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SHORT STORIES

No. 654.] For the Week Ending July 13th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

THE GOLDEN DWARF.

By R. Norman Silver.

"Hush, Brian, dear," begged Felix brokenly, "you distress mother. We will talk about father some other time, you and I."

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Persuade your best friend to read "The Golden Dwarf."

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The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST INSTALMENT OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Otto Hare would like to suggest that he did—Esther's mercenary mother accepts his hints. She wants the Golden Dwarf for a son-in-law.

Felix is secretly loved by Judith Garland, a striking brunette, Lady Dering's companion. She has a wastrel brother, Neal, who is unaccountably in Wyresdale, and who is demanding money. This, by an affectation of sisterly solicitude, Judith obtains, as a cheque, from Felix Dering. The cheque is payable to bearer.

Otto Hare has an ally, a strange German physician, Joseph Kraft, who lives with him at Wyresdale Park, the Golden Dwarf's residence. He is an object of much curiosity to Archibald Geddes, a clever assistant at the Wyresdale Pharmacy, which is kept by a drunken old chemist, Caleb Forester.

Caleb has a charming daughter, Connie, whom Geddes is making bashful love to. She is Esther's friend, and quarrels with Geddes for crediting the rumour that Felix killed his uncle.

A one-armed sailor has suddenly appeared in Wyresdale. At the chemist's shop he encounters Kraft, whom he follows, and on the strength of some past episode at emps to blackmail. Kraft repulses him, but is dexterously tracked by the sailor to a curious fort-like structure in Wyresdale Park.

While spying on this the sailor is attacked by a huge dog, which he stabs. He is seen by Kraft and the Golden Dwarf.

Esther tells Felix of her mother's plan to marry her to Otto Hare. They swear constancy in an old and picturesque oath. Felix returns to Dering House, to be asked by the child Brian if it is true Felix has taken his father away.

Judith Garland shows Felix several links of a chain he has been in the habit of wearing. They are bloodstained. She adds that they were found near the cross roads, where Sir Christopher's body was discovered, and that, moreover, Felix was seen near the place at ten o'clock on the night when he was supposed to be in Duchester. She assures him she will keep his secret.

Felix in vain protests his innocence. At this moment an inspector of the local police is announced.

Felix Dering staggers—is he dreaming, the prey of some hideous nightmare?

A caution sounds in his ears; Judith Garland is speaking to him. "Don't look like that," she whispers, "pull yourself together."

Notwithstanding their alarm, the police-officer—one Inspector Brasher—has merely called to arrest, on suspicion of being concerned in Sir Christopher's death, a certain Edward Spencer, a young Irish groom whom the baronet, shortly before his death, had given notice to leave. Protesting his innocence, Spencer is taken away. While on the route to the little country police-station, he was seen by Foley, with whom Dr. Kraft has been holding a mysterious consultation. Almost immediately afterwards, Foley, by chance, makes the acquaintance of Neal Garland. "Here, my hearty," asks the sailor in his maritime lingo, "what was it you picked up yonder and gave to the taut little craft you had with you?" He is referring to the meeting of Judith and Neal at the stile.

The scene changes. During a walk in the meadows on a pleasant Sabbath morning, Felix tells Esther that he was indeed in Wyresdale that fatal evening, and explains his return. A new sensation interrupts their conversation, Felix is called to the small local police-station. It has a single cell, and in this Ted Spencer had been confined over an adjourned inquest. This cell is now empty, Spencer has vanished. The barred window has been broken through—from the outside!

CHAPTER VII.

"You'll Have to Go Shares."

"I don't know you from Adam, my man, and as I'm in a hurry I'll thank you to stand aside and let me pass."

Nicholas Foley placed his one athletic palm on the chest of the fellow who, after crawling backwards through the gnarled stems of the hawthorn hedge, had just risen to an upright position.

"Easy, messmate," he retorted; "you mightn't have the pleasure of my acquaintance and yet be no stranger to me. Let me prove it to you. You never saw me before in your life, but when you showed a glim at the stile last night, I was within hail; ay, and closer."

Neal Garland's dark features assumed a menacing expression and the stiff black hairs upon his upper lip bristled, as if they had been the feelers of some angry beast. He brushed the withered grass-blades from his garments and tried to sneer. The sailor went on, still remaining between his prisoner and the road.

"Consekently," he said, "I see you overhaul a bit of paper, give you by a smart little piece you called Judith, and which you allowed was a pay-note, signed by Felix Dering, and worth twenty quid to bearer."

The listener clenched a couple of soiled fists.

"Out of my path, you meddling fool," he stormed, and made a dive to escape his tormentor.

Nicholas Foley headed off the manœuvre and resumed his statement.

"Chucking down the match you'd struck," proceeded the sailor; "you was going to weigh anchor, but Judy hadn't finished with you. Says she, 'Neal Garland, spin me the yarn of Sir Christopher Dering's death,' or words to sich an effect."

Neal gathered himself together at this startling intimation, and without warning, sprang on Nicholas Foley. His lean fingers shot out towards the loose pocket, on the front

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of the sailor's hip, where was deposited a certain buckhorn hafted clasp-knife. The dagger-like handle had been noted by Neal Garland's comprehensive glance.

Nicholas bent and ducked through his antagonist's legs; their owner was hurled to the ground minus his projected booty. Snatching out the weapon thus retained, the sailor opened it, and mounted guard over his captive.

"Afore you could tip her an answer," pursued Foley, "the grass, which is more hay than grass in these hedgerows, blazed up—fired by your smouldering match—and you had to stamp it out. Your foot grinded on summat, you collared the thing and lighted another fusee to take stock of it. 'That's what he was searching for!' cried you, and Judy says 'Who?' and you told her 'A tall young chap, with a brown face and riding-boots and pretty moustaches.'"

Neal laid idly upon the parched turf, a sardonic smile stealing over his sallow countenance.

"Then the fusee popped out," continued Nicholas, "and I seen no more, and only heard a word off and on. Once it was, from you, 'Past the Cross—the same, I'll swear—the night of the murder,' and once, from her, 'Leave all to me; Felix Dering shall pay both of us our price.'"

The ferocious mirth betrayed by Neal Garland's twitching mouth increased; his amusement became unmistakable.

"Now," added the sailor, "I'm in want of a few yellowboys myself, and if so be as silence is golden, Nick Foley's is worth as much as anyone else's. Do I stand in, messmate, or do I go to the perlice?"

Neal sat up, motioning away the keen blade which still menaced him.

"You're a wonder, my friend," he said; "under the circumstances I have no alternative but to explain. The trifle I annexed at the stile was a section of a watch-chain, the links of which were smeared with blood. That section my sister Judith recognised as similar in pattern to a guard usually worn by Felix Dering. The importance of those blood-stained links consists in the fact that Sir Christopher Dering's dead body was found a few yards from the spot. I suppose you'll have to go shares in whatever hold we may obtain over Master Felix. But for the life of me I can't tell you what your share is worth. Felix Dering has no money to speak of, though my sister Judith has a plan which may remedy that drawback. You must wait for your investment to mature, Mr. Foley."

Nicholas closed his knife, and slid it into the pocket on the front of his hip.

"Maybe," answered the sailor, "and maybe not. I can't decide till I've took soundings on my own account. Do you keep these waters, my hearty, or have you put in to refit?"

"Oh, I'm off south in a day or two," said Neal, rising. "I merely came to Derbyshire to visit my sister."

The grim and enigmatic laughter had passed from his face, which showed traces of a vicious ill-temper at this new complication in his affairs.

Nicholas Foley stepped clear of the unkempt figure; he was aware that, with his single arm, it was necessary to be on his guard against a possible further assault.

"So Judy hangs out in Wyresdale," reflected Nicholas. "I guess I'll need to enjoy the pleasure of her acquaintance. What is she—a barmaid?"

Neal winced. His own shabby costume had warranted the inference that Judith Garland's station could not but be humble.

"She is companion to Lady Dering," he said sharply.

The sailor slapped his thigh.

"Shiver my timbers!" he ejaculated, "that is good! So Judy stays at Dering House, and makes her market out of Mr. Felix. The clever little hussy! Jehoshophat! I remember Mr. Felix when he was a lad and supposed to be the heir—before the first Lady D. died. She had no babbies, and Mr. Felix was the Squire's eldest nephew. And now he's reckoned to be his uncle's murderer! Dear! dear! It's a wicked world!"

Nicholas wrinkled his mahogany cheeks into something that purported to be a shocked expression, yet which only succeeded in being a malicious and hypocritical one.

"Where were you bound as I fell over you?" he demanded a characteristic shrewdness displacing his pretence of melancholy.

"I was retiring for the night," confessed Neal Garland, and pointed towards the end of the cramped thoroughfare; "my couch of ferns in Wyresdale Park is peaceful and salubrious, which excellences cannot be claimed for my Pimlico pallet. Mr. Foley, you have won this evening's rubber. Whether it will repay you for your trouble is a problem the future alone can solve; meantime, I am your obedient servant."

And casting at the sailor a glance in which vindictiveness and mockery were blended, he ran up the road and disappeared round a slight curve.

Nicholas Foley burst into a peal of odd merriment. As he retraced the route to his cottage he gazed thoughtfully into the roseate West, and the cool breezes of the early evening fanned his withered cheek.

"Same old sun," he muttered to himself, "same old earth, same old human nature! Nicholas, you're in for a bit of luck."

As he uttered the words he paused at the rustic gate of his small garden.

Upon the threshold of the dilapidated house beyond, was a stooping, undersized figure, with silvery locks beneath a square crowned black hat.

"By the great horn spoon," exclaimed Nicholas; "if it isn't Caleb Forester!"

He hurried up the rubble walk and clapped the chemist on the shoulder.

"What cheer, matey," he cried; "to think of you boarding me permiscuous like this! I asked them at the shop to report my call 'tother morning, but I reckoned on having to fire a shot across your bows myself. Come into the shanty and we'll have a glass of grog."

He turned the latch of the cottage door, kicked at it, and it swung wide.

Caleb Forester advanced, peering nervously about him. There were a few embers in the high grate, a table in the middle of the principal room bore a loaf of bread, a slab of cheese, a pitcher, a mug, and a whiskey-bottle, half full. On a delf platter was the bare spine of a herring.

The sailor placed a wooden chair for his guest, sought out an extra mug, tipped into the two a liberal quantity of the yellow spirit, qualified his own by a dash from the pitcher, and thrust the second vessel to Caleb. The chemist diluted its contents and gulped them greedily.

Nicholas watched him.

"Dry as ever, Caleb?" he said.

The visitor nodded and his host tapped the bottle.

"Plenty more!" he announced.

But the chemist drained his mug and turned it upside down.

"My brain's not as thick as yours," he snarled, depositing his hat on the table; "you've a skull of brass and a stomach of leather, and always had, be hanged to you!"

Nicholas replenished his drinking-vessel, he had emptied it at a draught.

"Why are you here?" he pursued, filling a briar pipe with a magnificent Virginian leaf tobacco which had palpably not been bought in Wyresdale; "you was never proud enough of our relationship to act on it uninvited."

Caleb coughed and cracked his pallid fingers—his frail, restless limbs afforded a peculiar contrast to the burly, indolent frame of the sailor.

"I was told about your visiting at the shop," he faltered; "but I was quite prepared for that—knowing that you

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were in the village. I—I saw you at the cross-roads, drunk, last Wednesday night"

Nicholas sprang to his feet, his brows knit, his skin purple, his discoloured teeth protruding.

"The night of the murder!" he hissed; "Caleb, you lubber, do you want me gaoled, your own brother-in-law?"

The chemist shrank from the fierce lineaments which glared at him.

"It—it didn't occur to me to suspect you!" he stammered, "but if I had done, I should have dismissed the idea on finding you had lost an arm—it was too dark to notice the fact on Wednesday. But Sir Christopher was not stunned and suffocated, my dear Nicholas, by a man with one arm—the fact is surely obvious."

At this consoling admission the sailor, with an effort, regained his equanimity.

"Least said, soonest mended," he growled, "where no offence was meant, none should be taken. But you haven't told me yet why you looked me up."

Caleb Forester leaned over the table.

"Did—did you see anything particular at the cross-roads that night?" he murmured.

Nicholas affected to ponder.

"N—no," said the sailor, "I was too drunk to see, Caleb, even you, so I cou'dn't swear to your being there, if I was put in the box, saving to you telling me yourself."

The chemist started and abandoned his seat.

"You're joking, Nicholas," he answered, "but I don't care for such fun, it's too ghastly. However, if you didn't see anyone, you didn't. I'll say good-evening to you now, Nicholas, I promised to be back at the shop in half-an-hour."

Nicholas Foley caught his brother-in-law by a button-hole

"What did you think I might have seen?" he inquired.

"Oh, something connected with the murder, of course," said Caleb nervously, "I've a notion to be a sort of amateur detective, Nicholas. I wondered if you could help me to a clue. You've disappointed me, really. Good evening."

He donned his square crowned hat and evaded the sailor's attempts to detain him. Hastening through the low exit, he waved a rather hysterical farewell and departed.

The sailor compounded, with inexpressionable unction, a brimming mug of whisky-and-water and consumed it in silence. Then he smote his thigh, as if profoundly surprised and amused, and fixing his own slouched felt on his cropped head, marched off. He did not trouble to secure the latch, but left the door ajar.

The sunset sky was fading into a deep indigo as he went up the grassy lane towards the Cross. He passed the gravelled island in whose midst was reared that ancient land-mark, and strode on until he reached a drooping bough which over-hung the brick wall of Wyresdale Park, the house of the rich, if diminutive, person known, for miles about, as the Golden Dwarf.

Scanning the deserted prospect for possible spectators, Nicholas satisfied himself of his comparative privacy. This precaution finished, he grasped the branch with his knotted palm, and, exerting a tremendous strength, lifted himself elbow-high. The feat, though inelegant, enabled him to fling a leg over the rocking support. As agile as a monkey, he ran along the bough and dropped into the park.

Not far away, was the singular edifice on which he had been spying when the Golden Dwarf's favourite mastiff came by so unexpected a death at Nicholas Foley's hands. The shadows were veiling its stout walls and curious, round-topped tower. Screened by the uncertain light, the sailor darted to the base of the latter, and peered about its massive entrance.

Suddenly a voice arrested him, a sonorous, meditative voice, that carolled a rumbling song and drew nearer and nearer through the scented August night. Nicholas could distinguish the words—they were rolled out in a good English, a guttural German ring to them.

"It was upon a Monday,
Upon a Monday free,
That Mynheer Jacob van Artevelde,
Unto his men said he:"

"Dutchy!" muttered the sailor, and dodged into a sheltered corner some distance from the door. He was right; Dr. Joseph Kraft, in evening dress, a cigar in his fingers and the first rays of the moon glimmering on the lenses of his spectacles, stepped over the dewy turf and halted at the mysterious entrance. Unlocking it with a bright steel key, he vanished into the tower.

Nicholas shook his fist at the nail-studded portal. "Curse you!" he grumbled; "if only I could get inside I might learn some more of Dutchy's secrets. It's a soft job for a quiet man, taking money to hold your tongue. Wonder what this affair of Mr. Dering's 'll pan out like." A chuckle broke from his tanned throat. "Murder's a business that weighs heavy on the mind," he growled, "and the ill-convenience must be charged for."

An echoing bay interrupted him—it was replied to by another and another. The great dogs that evening let loose in Wyresdale Park had scented a stranger.

Nicholas Foley blasphemed. But he doubled back, nevertheless, from the ominous sounds, and was soon scaling the brick wall that shut in the Golden Dwarf's abode.

CHAPTER VIII.

"She Does Not Suspect Me—Yet!"

"But why should he want to escape if he were not guilty?"

The question was propounded by Felix Dering. He stood within the strong-room at the Wyresdale police-station, and contemplated thoughtfully the small, high window through which—helped by some unknown friend—Ted Spencer, the young Irish groom accused of Sir Christopher's murder, had made his exit.

Archibald Geddes traced an invisible ring on the concrete floor with a neatly-polished shoe.

"Perhaps the one that helped him to get off could throw light on the point," retorted the Scotchman. "Spencer said at the commencement of the inquest yesterday that he saw a fellow leading a horse with a rider on it that looked very like as if he might be Sir Christopher, ill or wounded. Don't you think, Mr. Dering, if Spencer spoke the truth, it would be good policy for him to be spirited out of the way, lest he should identify, by any chance, the person he saw?"

Felix considered the suggestion. "It's a very reasonable view," he admitted, "and allows us to believe Spencer innocent—I cannot bring myself to look upon him as the criminal. Yet, in the event which you describe, it is unfortunate for him that he consented to fly when the road was freed. It will damage him at the adjourned inquest; the verdict will infallibly be murder, and against him."

"What if that were foreseen, too," queried Geddes, "by the poor lad's pretended rescuer?"

Felix shook his head. "Now you are growing fanciful," he demurred; "let us have a glimpse at the outside of the window. The bars appear to have been removed in a most scientific fashion."

The chemist's assistant studied his companion as they passed into the general office of the little police department, and threaded its short entries to the rear. Unconscious of the close and singular analysis with which Archibald Geddes was favouring him, Felix penetrated a clump of bushes that backed upon the window of the strong-room.

Here, at the foot of the wall, were laid a heap of rusty iron bars. They had been displaced by some skilful

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operator from the casement above, their limed extremities showing where they had been set in the brickwork. A bend in each testified to the strength of the hand that had drawn them out of their sockets. The glass and its wooden frame had been levered away and deposited among the shrubs.

"This is no amateur performance, Geddes," exclaimed Felix Dering; "although these rods were only intended to confine an occasional drunkard or a petty thief, yet they are moderately stout. It is improbable that Spencer, unaided, could have wrenched them clear and dropped that frame down. But it might have fallen on the soil with a minimum of noise; what makes you so confident of his having had an ally?"

"Out of my path, you meddling fool," he stormed.

"The bars were on the outside of the window, Brasher says," replied the Scotchman, "and mark this, sir"—he indicated a couple of deep impressions in the earth under the ruined casement—"they're the traces of a ladder—the fellow was bold enough to bring or borrow it."

"Upon my word, Geddes," cried Felix, "you have a quick observation!"

"Brasher is the author of the discovery and the inference," answered Archibald Geddes; "he is fit to shoot himself now that the mischief is done. Spencer should have been sent to Duchester gaol over the week-end. But the Inspector kept him in Wyresdale for the sake of reflecting importance upon the local authorities. Brasher's weakness is vanity, otherwise he is quite a smart constable, as county police go—he even noticed that Spencer's rescuer must have had his boots muffled, to avoid leaving footprints in the recently levelled soil."

"Heavens!" cried Felix Dering; "it has been quite an organised affair, then."

"So much the worse for Brasher," said the chemist's assistant, with a patronising air; "he and I are on friendly terms enough, which accounts for my unofficial presence. But the more fuss there is made about the escape the hotter the Inspector will catch it. He will devote the rest of his career to tracking down the offender. I know Brasher."

The Scotchman spoke this prophecy in a manner that conveyed a species of warning. Felix Dering, however, was so engrossed by his own bewildered meditations that he failed to demand a reason for the other's significant intonation.

"I am sorry for the Inspector," he declared absently, "but as I am not a Justice of the Peace, I have no right to interfere. The law must avenge my uncle's death according to its lights; I cannot feel that a shadow of real proof has been adduced against Spencer. If he is guiltless, as I feel he is, I am glad he has escaped."

With which candid admission, Felix, not dreaming that he had lent grave support, in the Scotchman's mind, to a terrible theory—of Archibald Geddes's own evolving—bade him good-day. Re-entering the police-station, he acknowledged the salute of the constable at the desk, and walked out. The atmosphere of the miniature gaol was repellent to him.

As he went towards the gates of Dering House through the placid summer noon, his brain was occupied with the inexplicable details of the mystery that had fallen upon Wyresdale.

How, and by whom, had Sir Christopher been slain in those unrecorded hours which had elapsed between the moment when he loosed rein to canter home for his belated dinner, and that when his lifeless corpse was found in the ditch near the Rosery? Who had whisked Ted Spencer out

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of his prison, what malicious agency had brought into the possession of Judith Garland the bloodstained links that had convinced her of Felix Dering's guilt? Felix's brain reeled before a thousand improbable conjectures.

At the top of the avenue he gained a wide terrace that skirted the old and ivied mansion. Upon its gravelled expanse the child Brian was strolling gravely in his picturesque garments of velvet, black now instead of their wonted purple. By him, under a black lace sunshade, moved a despondent figure—the figure of Lady Dering.

Felix advanced and lifted his hat; she turned and glanced at him sadly.

Stella Dering was a pretty woman, with a weak mouth and large, pathetic violet pupils. Her faults were written upon her characterless features, but she was a good woman, and, in spite of her fretful disposition, had a kind heart.

Her young kinsman was a favourite of hers, his chivalric nature had made him invariably considerate of her overstrung nerves. Also, he loved Brian, her one child, and Brian worshipped his gallant cousin; he ran to clasp Felix's strong palm and be swung up to his shoulder.

"Cousin Felix," he cried, pushing back his sailor hat of white straw; "won't you tell me where father is? You said you hadn't taken him from me, you know, and he hasn't come back, all the same."

Felix averted his head; a lump had risen in his throat—Lady Dering covered her face with her handkerchief.

"Hush, Brian, dear," begged Felix, brokenly, "you distress mother—we will talk about father some other time you and I."

"Yes," conceded Brian, "but I do want a drive to-morrow and I must ask him quick, or he will go without me, as he always does. If you had taken him away, Cousin Felix, you would have had to take me, too."

Felix groaned; the child was wringing both their hearts.

"Oh, no," he answered, huskily; "you would have stayed with mother, wouldn't you?"

The little baronet dissented.

"Mother gets tired of me," was his shrewd objection; father only said, "Come and have a romp, you rascal!"

Lady Dering sat down upon a garden-chair and wept aloud.

Brian slipped out of his cousin's arm and climbed up by her.

"Don't cry, mother," he whispered "I'd rather be with you, often—I would, indeed."

His mother clasped him to her widowed bosom and sobbed. Suddenly she released him and bade him fetch some cake for the pea-fowl; his absence would give her an opportunity to regain her self-control. Felix leaned over the chair as Brian trotted off.

"You heard what the child told me," he murmured; "that I had said I had not taken his father from him. The slander had reached his innocent ears—the Wyresdale gossips would rejoice if they could learn the fact. My misunderstanding with Sir Christopher that afternoon will cost me a heavy price."

Stella Dering gazed at the man who—though about her own age—was nominally her nephew. "You don't mean," she stammered; "you are suspected of—oh, my poor boy, how absurd! Why, you were in Duchester when—it—it must have been done."

Felix shivered. "Would you credit the slander if I had not been?" he queried, hoarsely.

The dead man's wife looked into the generous countenance of her questioner. Her child had dispoiled him of a home and a fortune, yet she felt that he had never regretted his loss, that he loved Brian as if the boy were his own.

"What a foolish idea!" she said; "of course not! Here is Brian with the cake; do not let us speak of Kit's death before him—I cannot bear it."

She took the dainty from the childish fingers and broke it into crumbs for the splendid birds.

Felix slipped away. In the portico of Dering House he glanced back at the figure of the bereaved woman, playing sorrowfully with her young son.

"Thank heaven *she* does not suspect me—yet!" he muttered.

CHAPTER IX.

A New Twist in the Skein.

"You must not think, Miss Carew, because I am as I am, that I differ seriously from other men."

It was Otto Hare who spoke; he was lounging among the cushions of a big and padded "chesterfield" in the window-bay which over-looked the Rosery gaden. His dark eyes were fixed on the slender figure of the girl who sat opposite him plying her embroidery needle with a nervous deliberation; he had relinquished his tea-cup, it rested on the low Moorish stool between them. The urn and cake-baskets were deserted—Mrs. Carew had contrived to be called away, leaving the Golden Dwarf and her daughter together.

"For instance," he pursued, a trifle disdainfully; "I can ride, shoot, swim, fence, and talk in four languages; there you have the equipment of the well-bred Briton. I am proud, revengeful, constant, passionate—which is as much as to say, I have red blood in my veins. Yet for fifteen years, Miss Carew, I had not gazed upon the face of a young and lovely woman. Then I beheld yours."

Esther's fair curls were bent over her work; she did not interrupt the Golden Dwarf's monologue. Once, however, she touched a little locket which hung at her throat—it held a portrait of Felix Dering.

"In that moment," said Otto Hare; "I realised how powerless was ambition—and I have had ambitions, Miss Carew—beside the unconscious charm wielded by your gentle sex. You are the flowers in earth's garden, do not blame us for desiring to pluck you."

He studied her attentively; Esther Carew's blue eyes, rippling blonde locks, and the milk and roses of her cheeks were, indeed, a text for poetical similes. The Golden Dwarf slipped his hand into his vest-pocket, produced a shallow case and pressed a spring. The lid of the receptacle shot up, to reveal a circlet of priceless old filagree, crusted with gems—rubies, emeralds and diamonds. As an ornament it was costly, as an article of it *vertu* was inestimable.

"Beautiful things should have beautiful owners," murmured Otto Hare, lifting the bracelet from its bed of silk. "Miss Carew, will you gratify me by accepting this? It is Oriental and of a somewhat rare finish."

Esther drew her breath, the proffered gift was beautiful, and she thought rather of its beauty than of its worth. But the expression on the Golden Dwarf's saturnine features recalled her to herself.

"It is indeed marvellous," she faltered, her gaze roverting to the barbaric splendour of yellow and red and green and translucent crystal, "but I could not take it; thank you very much, Mr. Hare, but really I could not."

The Golden Dwarf put the bracelet under his foot and crushed the jewel to a shapeless mass.

"Since you will not wear it," he said, slipping the ruined ornament calmly into his pocket with the case, "no woman ever shall."

Esther was terrified by the fierce determination evinced in this remarkable act. Before she could utter the words of regret that had lingered on her lips, the door opened and Mrs. Carew entered smilingly.

"So sorry to have been detained," she began: "Esther, dear, did you ask Mr. Hare to have some more tea?"

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Astute by nature and training, the widow could not fail to perceive that her daughter and the Golden Dwarf were upon strained terms. She was too diplomatic to take notice of it, but a vague anxiety filled her scheming heart. Surely Otto Hare had not been fool enough to propose upon so short an acquaintance, ere his wealth and position had had time to dazzle Esther's blue orbs, before her mother had been able to soften and bend her youthful will!

The Golden Dwarf rose.

"I have been too agreeably entertained by Miss Carew's conversation," he said sardonically, "to spare a thought for mundane realities. It is a pleasure I hope to renew."

He turned towards Esther with a certain dry significance.

"Ah," he said; "I was going to tear myself away before discharging my mission. Mrs. Carew, I am inclined to signalise my return to the world by throwing my gates open to my neighbours. I have no lady to receive my guests, may I venture to solicit your good offices?"

Mrs. Carew gasped delightedly. To play the part of hostess to the bachelor owner of Wyresdale Park—to penetrate its mysteries, and, for a few hours, to control its enormous social resources, it would confer upon her a position in Wyresdale second hardly to that of Lady Dering.

"I shall be charmed, Mr. Hare," she told him; "now that terrible inquest is over and the police have allowed the supposed criminal to escape, we will all be glad to forget the dismal affair for a while. And, in any case, it is most charitable of you to waken Wyresdale from its native dulness. Everybody will be delighted at the mere prospect of penetrating some of your reputed secrets."

Otto Hare made a contemptuous gesture. "Secrets which exist only in the imagination of Wyresdale!" he answered. "A thousand thanks, Mrs. Carew, for your promise to further my project; Miss Carew, permit me to confess that I shall estimate the success of my little fête by the amount of pleasure you derive from it."

He shook hands with her—his powerful though diminutive fingers causing her a curious thrill of revulsion—bade farewell to Mrs. Carew, and took his departure. On the threshold he passed a graceful, sombrely-dressed woman, whose dark, intelligent countenance moved him to a second scrutiny.

It had in it a force and selfishness akin to that betrayed by his own. As he walked out to his phaeton, he heard her name given to the maid—it was "Miss Garland."

Mrs. Carew greeted the newcomer with a degree of patronage—for was not Judith a paid companion, and had not she herself (though once but little better than a social outsider in Wyresdale) become now the chosen friend of the millionaire Golden Dwarf? Much had happened in Wyresdale since last Miss Garland had condescended to call at the Rosery.

"And how is Lady Dering?" asked Mrs. Carew, as she filled a cup of tea for her guest; "still quite prostrate, I suppose. But little Sir Brian will be a comfort to her, no doubt—she will bear up for his sake."

Judith Garland's lip curled.

"The child means a great deal to her, Mrs. Carew," she said, cynically; "if it were not for Brian, Lady Dering would soon be a mere dowager, and Mr. Dering would step into a very decent property."

Mrs. Carew glanced at Esther—Judith saw it and barbed an arrow for the girl's bosom.

"I believe," she said, and trifled with her spoon, "Mr Dering was about to leave for America when Sir Christopher's death detained him. If he had only sailed a fortnight ago he might never have learned how few true friends he had in Wyresdale. Of course, we did not credit the slanderous insinuation that he could have told the real story of the squire's murder. But some people did, and practically cut him."

A hot tear trickled down Esther Carew's cheek and splashed upon her embroidery. Judith gloated over her suffering.

"I imagine it was Mr. Hare who drove off just as I called," she called; "you are fortunate in striking up an acquaintance with him—he is enormously rich and quite nice, they say, in spite of his being a dwarf and a recluse."

Mrs. Carew fathomed the depths of Judith's malice, though she did not entirely comprehend its cause.

"Mr. Hare will be a recluse no longer," she said; "he is planning a garden-party in Wyresdale Park; being a bachelor, he wishes me to receive for him."

Judith started—the object of her visit was gained and another item of Wyresdale gossip vindicated.

"I congratulate you," she replied, putting down her cup; "it is an ill wind—you remember the proverb? Sir Christopher's death, I fancy, was the means of introducing Mr. Hare to you. We are all speculating on the cause of his sudden resolution not to shut himself up any more. Rumour has it that a pretty face—but there, I mustn't be indiscreet. Good-day, dear Mrs. Carew; bye-bye, Esther, get me an invitation to Mr. Hare's party, won't you?"

Esther could not have answered to save her life; every syllable of Judith Garland's had stabbed her deeply. She realised that her mother's heartless attitude towards Felix was as clear to Judith Garland as were Mrs. Carew's mercenary schemes respecting the Golden Dwarf. As her skilful tormentor departed she burst into a passion of grief, whose abandonment and intensity disconcerted her mother.

As for Judith, she communed with herself on the road to Dering House.

"I was right," she muttered; "they have thrown him over and are angling for that strange creature, Otto Hare. If I do not act quickly Felix will fling himself out of England in despair. I cannot lose him so. Guilty or not guilty of his uncle's death, he is the only man I ever cared for, and I will win him. There is but one way to keep him in Wyresdale—that way shall be taken."

This resolution, whatever its purport, made the rest of the afternoon and evening seem to Judith Garland like a week of ordinary days. Nor, when she went to her bedroom, did she prepare for sleep. Donning a thick cloak, she wrapped a shawl about her head and waited till all was silent in the old mansion.

Then, noiselessly, she stole from corridor to corridor of Dering House, reaching at length the nursery of its childmaster, the little Sir Brian. Lifting the slumbering boy out of his cot, she folded him in her cloak and carried him down the wide stairs and through the dusky hall. At the side door she drew a couple of bolts and bore him forth into the night air. The moon was up, but veiled by flying clouds.

(To be continued.)

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we shall give full particulars of the new serial story,

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BY ♣ LIP ♣ MOVEMENT.

In the dimness and silence of the great West-End square the strip of red carpet that cut across the pavement and trailed up the broad stone steps to the portico of the house caught my eye in passing. Having nothing particular on hand at the moment I paused to see what was going on.

It was early yet for Society dinner-parties and crushes, the season being quite in its infancy. These people, whoever they were, were evidently determined to take time by the forelock and set the ball rolling at the first possible moment.

The guests were evidently slow in arriving, for though I waited several minutes I was rewarded by seeing nothing more imposing than a telegraph boy, who handed in his message and clattered off down the steps again.

Just as I was about to pass on, however, the lights of a hansom swung round the corner, and the vehicle came jingling leisurely towards the house. I looked for a man in evening dress, but to my surprise it was a young and exceedingly pretty girl, a white-furred opera cloak thrown loosely around her delicate shoulders and carrying a guitar-case in her hand, who alighted on the pavement within a yard or two of me.

As she crossed towards the steps her purse, which she had taken out to pay the cabman, fell with a soft flop on to the strip of carpet. I shot forward at once, picked it up, and restored it to her with a bow.

She took it from me with a most winsome smile and a soft murmur of thanks, while her limpid brown eyes, which shone in that dim light like two lovely stars, rested upon me for one fleeting second. Then she passed on up the steps, and the door closed upon this beautiful vision.

Though I had not been greatly interested in the proceedings so far, somehow it was very different now. In truth, that smile and the look which accompanied it had made more than a passing impression upon me. I wanted to see this charming creature again, felt as if I must see her, even though I had to loiter about until the small hours of the morning. As I looked up at the closed door I was conscious of a very envious feeling towards those who had the undisputed right of entry, and strongly inclined to rail against my own hard luck at being left out in the cold.

While I lingered on, unwilling to tear myself away, the door yawned open again. I glanced up to find a tall man in evening dress standing on the steps, his imposing figure silhouetted against the flood of light that came from the hall behind him.

He was, in many respects, a man worth looking at. Strikingly handsome, with a commanding presence and dark, flashing eyes, he caught and rivetted your attention on the instant.

At the present moment, however, he appeared strangely perturbed and upset. As he stood there, folding and unfolding a slip of pink paper—a telegram evidently—in a nervously abstracted manner, I could see that he was planted fairly and squarely on the horns of a dilemma, and was feverishly casting about in his mind for some way of escape.

His gaze swept round until it encountered my figure in the background. Instantly his dark eyes fastened upon me—clutched at me, as it were, with a kind of eager avidity. He was a man in a strait—a grievous strait, perhaps—and like all such was ready to grab at any straw within reach.

He tried to drag his gaze away, but it came back again instantly in my direction, and his keen eye played over me like the point of a rapier.

I made no move of any sort. I just stood still and watched that silent struggle, knowing full well that something would come of it. And something did come of it very soon.

My friend on the steps looked at me again, paused, hesitated a moment, and then came pit-patting down to the spot where I was standing.

"Excuse me," he said, speaking very hurriedly, and yet in the courteous tones of one about to ask a favour, "but do you happen to have any pressing engagement this evening?"

"Neither pressing nor otherwise," I answered airily.

"Ah!" he said with a pleased sparkle in his eyes, for the spirit in which I took his advances evidently went far to relieve him of his embarrassment. "Then you have it in your power to render me a service which will lay me under the deepest obligation, and which, I venture to think, will prove an agreeable method of passing a spare hour or two as far as you yourself are concerned."

"Indeed! Might I inquire the nature of this service you speak of?"

"Simply this: I am giving a little entertainment to some friends of mine"—here he waved his white hand towards the house—"*tableaux vivants*, and things of that kind, you know; just an informal and quite impromptu affair. Unfortunately, one of my guests, who was to have taken a leading part, wires me to say that he has been prevented from coming at the last moment through sudden indisposition. By an extraordinary coincidence, you bear a somewhat close resemblance to him, and——"

"You wish me to take his place?" I said, seeing that he paused; and I rather fancy there was a certain tell-tale eagerness in my tones, for the thought of seeing that beautiful girl again caused quite a little flutter within me.

"If you would be so kind," he murmured insinuatingly.

If I would be so kind! Why, I was ready to jump at the proposal. Here was the very chance for which I had longed thrown right in my way, the closed door opened to me. I could think of nothing else at the moment.

I was on the point of closing with his suggestion, for I was eager enough to avail of this unexpected opportunity, when a sudden thought occurred to me, and I glanced down doubtfully at my plain suit of tweed.

He read the looks at once.

"There are several costumes inside which are at your disposal," he said. "The little representations I propose to give will be principally tropical scenes, illustrative of life in Mexico and thereabouts. My guests are mostly from that part of the world, you see. By

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the way," he added, breaking off suddenly and looking straight at me, "you do not understand Spanish, do you?"

"Not a word," I assured him with perfect truthfulness.

"Ah!"

It was difficult to put a precise meaning upon that "Ah!" for the tone in which it was uttered was a singular one. Nor did my companion give me much time to puzzle over the point. Wheeling round he led the way up the steps, and conducted me through the brilliantly-lighted hall to a snug little retreat at the back, half study, half dressing-room.

He certainly had provided a varied assortment of costumes to choose from, though the picturesque tunic, flaring red sash, and broad sombrero of the Mexican was the one most in evidence.

Passing over these, however, he singled out for me a rich Spanish uniform, a marvel of gold lace, which might have done duty for an ambassador at the very least. I fancy my eyes sparkled a little at sight of it, for there was one among the company upon whom I was anxious to make an impression, and was not a little pleased at the thought of appearing before her in such fine feathers.

The host left me while I effected my change of raiment, and when I emerged from the room, in all the splendour of my borrowed plumes, I found him waiting for me outside.

Already there was a marvellous change in him. He was like a different man. The worried look had completely vanished, and he was evidently in the best of spirits again.

Nor, now that he had secured his man, if I may so express it, did he appear in any particular hurry to return to his guests. Taking me by the arm in quite a friendly way he drew me into the dining-room, which was unoccupied at the moment, and took a decanter from the sideboard.

While we chatted over a glass of wine, he informed me that his name was Orlebar, and that he had seen a good deal of the rough side of life abroad, especially in Mexico.

All this time I kept wondering where were the guests, for I could hear no sounds of festivity in any of the adjoining rooms. Unless, in the absence of their host,

"I read, word for word as it were: 'You—are—in—great—danger! Fly!'"

Persuade your best friend to read "The Golden Dwarf."

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they were simply twirling their thumbs for want of something better to do, I couldn't make it out.

At last my companion led me from the room with the air of a man who had a little surprise in store, which he wished to spring upon me suddenly. Instead of moving towards the reception-rooms, however, he drew me along a handsome corridor which gave access to a spacious conservatory at the back. Looking on ahead I could see that the place was a blaze of electric lights.

Passing through the rows of magnificent palms and rare exotic plants we reached a door opening on to the garden. Just as my foot was upon the threshold I stopped short with a regular gasp of surprise, for a most wonderful, a truly fairy-like scene, burst upon my astonished vision.

The garden was evidently a large one, the space nearest the house being occupied by a velvety green sward. Beyond, wherever the eye turned, grottoes, pagodas, marvels of every kind were to be seen. You heard the splashing of tiny cascades; the soft hissing of concealed fountains. The skill of the landscape gardener, in fact had converted this ordinary London pleasure ground into some dream of the tropics.

Everywhere there were fairy lamps and Chinese lanterns, their soft, coloured glow, the flickering lights and shades of the whole place, producing a most wonderful effect upon the imagination.

To add to the impression, from some secluded nook to the right came the silvery tinkle of a guitar; and even as I stood there, lost in stricken wonder, a soft, musical voice—a woman's voice—poured forth a flood of melody from that concealment.

Upon the sward in front a number of men in evening dress were grouped; some few pacing slowly to and fro in couples. They were men of swarthy complexions and flashing eyes, all of them; chattering noisily in some foreign tongue, and inhaling cigarettes the whole time.

I was aroused from my wondering abstraction by the sound of the host's voice in my ear.

"Our entertainment is quite an *al fresco* one, you see," he said with a little gratified laugh, as if my visible astonishment was by no means displeasing to him. "My friends being from the tropics, I thought they would enjoy themselves more out of doors, especially as the evening is so delightfully mild. But come; let us get supper out of the way before we ring up the curtain, as it were."

I felt strongly impelled to make a bee-line for that concealed nook where the singer was posted, but Mr. Orlebar led me straight across the velvety sward, at the further end of which a large marquee had been erected.

As I moved along by his side in my brilliant uniform, the chatter ceased as if by magic. The guests drew apart, and every eye in the place was fixed upon me in a strangely intent and observant manner. I cannot describe the peculiar sensation it gave rise to, the concentrated fire of those gleaming eyes, but it was not exactly a comfortable one.

As we entered the tent and passed round to the other side of the long, well-laden table, the others all trooped in after us. With a wave of his hand in my direction, Orlebar said something in Spanish—by way of introduction, I suppose—and I was treated to a series of stiff, icy bows, which I did my best to return without appearing to notice the singularly frigid reception accorded me. Needless to say, I was quite at a loss to understand the meaning of it.

During the whole course of the meal, which was an elaborate one, I was practically left out in the cold as far as the conversation went. Orlebar's whole attention was taken up in answering the fire of questions poured in upon him from every side. The extraordinary part of it was, that, judging by the repeated glances shot in my direction, these questions seemed somehow to have reference to my presence amongst them.

As the supper drew to a close, a servant entered and whispered something to the host. Orlebar rose from the table at once, murmured a few words of excuse in my ear, reeled off a string of Spanish to the others, and left the tent hurriedly.

The instant his back was turned, a wiry, wrinkled, little fellow, seated on my left, turned to me and scraped out a sentence in broken English.

"Vat's becoom-a boullion, hey?" he said, fixing me with his glittering eye.

Boullion? Boullion? What on earth did he mean? I ran my eye over everything on the table. Finally, I looked back at him, and shook my head.

With a quick, angry gesture he turned to the others, and instantly they fell to jabbering amongst themselves in the most vehement and excited manner. The next minute they rose from the table in a body and left the tent as if to hold a consultation outside. I remained seated there in solitary state, and not a little bewildered by the strange turn events were taking.

So far I had seen nothing of the girl; but now, as I happened to look up, I suddenly caught sight of her outside. She was passing slowly before the opening of the tent, her guitar in her hand. I kept my eyes fixed upon her, for there was something peculiar in her manner, that I could not very well understand.

Presently she paused, edged a little closer to the opening, and threw a quick glance around as if to see that no one was standing near. Then, with a rapid movement, she turned full in my direction, and gave me a look which seemed to strike a chill to my heart. The next second her lips began to move.

Fortunately for me, I had some little knowledge of lip language; that is to say, the formation of words by the movement of the lips, without any sound being emitted. And now, as I watched the girl with eager, breathless intentness, I read word for word as it were:

"You—are—in—danger—great danger. Fly!"

She was gone like a flash, and seemed to pass round towards the back of the tent.

Danger! My heart seemed to stand still as I rose to my feet. Then it suddenly started to beat again like the piston of a steam-engine, for I caught the soft pit-pat of footsteps on the grass outside, and knew that the foreigners were about to return. Three or four of them made their appearance the next moment, and posted themselves near the entrance of the tent as if to frustrate any attempt at escape on my part.

My senses were keenly, almost painfully, on the alert, and just at that moment I caught a stealthy ripping sort of sound behind me. There was a pause, and then the sound was repeated. I knew what it meant. Ah! that brave girl. She had slit the canvas of the tent from top to bottom, so as to make an opening by which I could effect my escape at the proper moment.

Very cautiously I edged my way back; and, without daring to turn round, thrust out my hand behind me, groped for the rent, and found it.

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Once or twice I thought of making a dive through the opening, but every time I glanced towards the entrance I caught the gleam of those watchful eyes in the semi-gloom outside, and knew that my slightest movement would only precipitate matters.

At last the rest of the foreigners came back, and the whole crowd trooped into the tent in a body. A striking and ominous change had taken place in their demeanour; their noisy chatter had given way to a sullen silence. I confess that I did not like the look of things at all.

They appeared to take no particular notice of me at first; but I observed with inward misgiving, that they were edging quietly round the table on either side, as if to hem me in.

I waited a moment or two longer, my heart beating as if it would stifle me. And then, as they came nearer, and I noticed that each man's hand was stealing slyly towards his breast, I flashed round in an instant and dived head foremost through the slit behind me.

At my very first movement the whole crowd set up a most appalling yell and rushed towards the spot, each with a glittering stilleto in his hand! But, thank Heaven! I was through the opening before they reached me, though I heard the whizz of those deadly weapons as they descended within a few feet of me!

Bolting around the tent I raced for the open door of the conservatory as I had never raced before. I reached it well ahead of those blood-thirsty wretches, who had scrambled out of the tent anyhow, slammed it in their faces, and turned the key in the lock. And then, as I started forward again, I ran right into the arms of Orlebar himself, who instantly closed with me!

For the first half-second or so I was too taken aback to try and shake him off; but, to my utter astonishment, he hissed sharply in my ear:

"Hit out, man! Struggle—fight! They'd have my life if they thought I allowed you to escape. I had no idea they would turn so confoundedly rusty!"

I did hit out; or rather I planted my knuckles on his chest and sent him crashing back amongst the flower pots. Then, while the others were clamouring at the door like a pack of wolves, I dashed on into the hall, and the next minute was tearing down the square in my magnificent, gold-laced uniform.

At the corner I saw a hansom waiting and instantly made towards it. To my surprise I found that it was already occupied, and by the beautiful girl to whom I owed my life!

"Thank Heaven, you have escaped!" she said, as she recognised me. "I could not go away until I knew you were safely out of their hands."

Hurriedly begging me not to stop, she handed me a card with her address, asked me to call the following afternoon, when she would endeavour to explain matters, and drove off.

* * * * *

Next day, my nerves being still a trifle shaky, I set out to call upon Miss Hendon—that was the young lady's name—and found her occupying a pretty flat in West Kensington, where she lived with her invalid mother.

"Mr. Orlebar," she explained, when we had settled down for a talk, "is a distant connection of ours. We have never seen very much of him, however, for most of his life has been spent in one of the smaller republics of Central America. I happened to meet him a few days ago, when he told me he was giving a little entertainment to some foreign friends, and said he would be most grateful if I would bring my guitar and help to amuse them for an hour or two.

"As it so happens, I have a brother who has lived for many years in Central America, though this fact was unknown to Mr. Orlebar. When he was last at home, being confined to the house a good deal by an accident, he amused himself by teaching me Spanish. On finding myself in the company of Mr. Orlebar's guests, therefore, I was able to follow the drift of their conversation easily enough.

"From what they said, and also from facts related to me by my brother, I learned that they were at one time at the head of affairs in their own country. The government was a very corrupt one, however; so much so, indeed, that it provoked a fierce and bloody revolution.

"The President was a man named De Castro, a close friend of Mr. Orlebar's. This De Castro had married an Englishwoman, but before these troubles broke out he had sent his wife over here to be out of harm's way. She was accompanied by their only son, who was a mere child at the time.

"Seeing that the insurgents were likely to get the upper-hand, De Castro, aided, it is said, by Mr. Orlebar, laid violent hands upon the Treasury, which was supposed to contain a vast sum in bullion, and escaped with it on board a trading steamer."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, for I now knew what my little wrinkled friend had been driving at when he spoke of "boullion."

"The other members of the government were not so fortunate. Those who escaped the fury of the mob were thrown into a fortress, where they languished year after year, probably almost forgotten by the victors.

"When they regained their liberty at last they lost no time in making their way to England, with the intention of compelling De Castro to make a division of the plunder amongst them. But de Castro, they found, was long since dead; his son, who was now grown up, having inherited his ill-gotten wealth.

"In their difficulty they sought out Mr. Orlebar, who was supposed to have had a share in the spoil, and no doubt compelled him by threats to invite the son of the ex-President to his house. From what they said, I gathered that they meditated evil of some kind if the young fellow refused to comply with their demands.

"My amazement was unbounded when I saw you enter in his place. I guessed that, for some reason of his own, Mr. Orlebar wished to palm you off upon his guests as the son of their old colleague. At the close of the supper I sent in a servant to inform him that I wished to return home at once. When he joined me outside, however, I begged him to lend me a certain book, which I knew it would take him some little time to find. Then, when the others had left the tent, I attempted to warn you in the only way open to me."

And, to my mind, Orlebar's motive was not far to seek. It was plain that he wished to keep in with both parties—to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. No doubt, under the pressure brought to bear upon him, he had invited de Castro to his house; but that young gentleman was not to be caught so easily. He must have got wind of the pleasant little reception which awaited him, and wriggled out of it by pleading "sudden indisposition."

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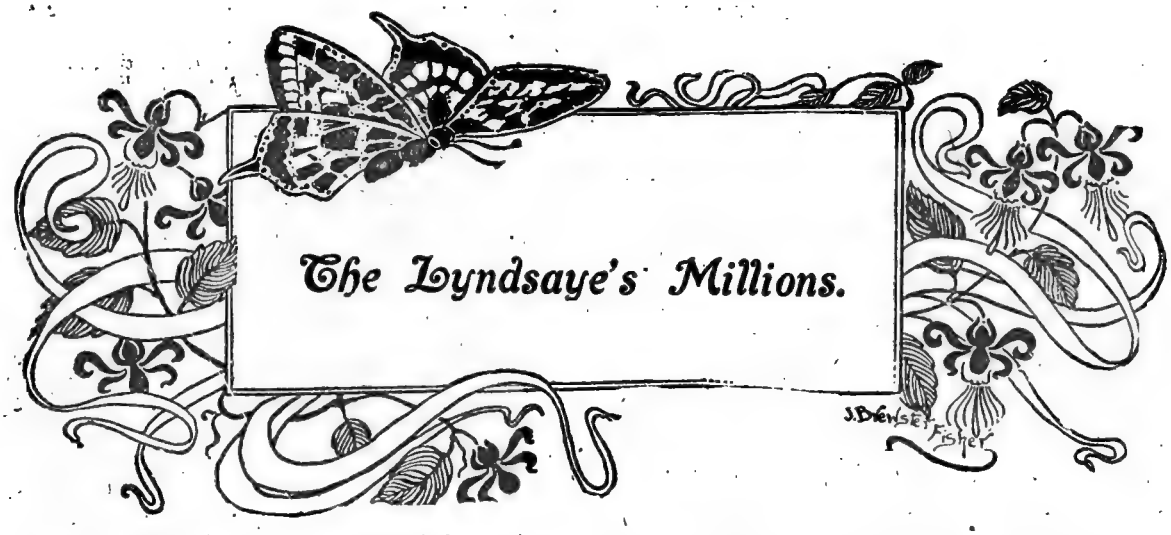

TRAVELLERS' tales, for many and obvious reasons, are not always to be relied upon.

Either they are related to gratify the personal vanity of the traveller himself, becoming then closely allied to the "fearful and wonderful," or they are the handed-down traditionary experiences of men and women of old, the intervening years having added whatever proportion and colour they may originally have lacked.

"Niggers" (that is to say, natives of Africa, the West Indian Islands, and so on) are adepts at this peculiar manipulation of the story-telling art; and as the island of Jamaica, or rather its surrounding waters, is the scene of the incident I am about to relate, one would naturally have to be upon one's guard when lending an ear to the ebon-hued spinner of yarns.

It must too, be borne in mind that the following account is satisfactorily authenticated, not only by the fact of the principal actors having been my own "forbears," but also in that the descriptive statement of the occurrence, bearing date 1760 (the year of King George the Thirds' accession to the throne of these realms,) is in the handwriting of my own great grandmother; and bears upon the face of it the unmistakeable mark of "truth dependable," which I have always understood to have been a notable characteristic of the old lady's.

It was quite by accident that I discovered the document referred to.

One day during the Winter of last year, I was for some reason or other, seized with a fit of "ferreting."

This meant of course, the turning out of long-hoarded, long-forgotten possessions, of every conceivable sort and description.

The largest part of this miscellaneous collection consisted, as in such cases it nearly always does, of old letters and papers.

I fear that Time had sadly discounted the original value of most of them; the fire, therefore, was in frequent requisition.

After an hour or two's hard "rummaging," I at length delved out a letter, dated from St. Anne's, near Port Royal, Jamaica, nearly a hundred and fifty years ago, and written in that fine, spiky, neat hand, so popular with the fair sex at that period.

Further than that I placed the yellow old packet on one side for future and more leisured inspection. I took no more present notice of it, beyond remarking in a casual way that the name "Romeo" occurred more than once in the somewhat lengthy account.

A few days afterwards I happened to be in Southampton on business—no matter of what nature—bent.

Taking a quiet stroll one evening "Above Bar," in the direction of the "Forest," I encountered an old, grey-headed negro crooning out, in the roadway, one of the plaintive melodies so dear to the average black man's soul.

I stopped—I don't know why—but I stopped, gave him alms, and made to pass on.

"Ole Romeo t'ank you, sah!—t'ank you berry much, sah!"

"Romeo!" I should have thought but little about it, had it not been for this faded old letter of my great grandmother's, Dame Mahetabel Lyndsaye.

The coincidence was so strange.

"Is Romeo really your given name?" I asked the poor old creature.

"Yes, sah! an' my fader's—he called Romeo, too—an' his fader—but I got no chile—I'se the berry last Romeo—Yes, sah!"

He had got up alongside the kerb, towards which I had beckoned him, and stood shivering in the cold wind, which was blowing in gusts down the road from the Forest.

"Where were you born?"

"I'se Jamaiky nigger, sah!—San Annes—Po't Ro'al. Warm—warm dere! here po' Romeo die, he so cold, sah!" and he shivered until it seemed that he must fall to pieces, so wretchedly attenuated was he.

That decided me. As I said before, I cannot, even now, explain why I did all this. I only know that I could not help doing it.

I took the poor old darkie to where he could be cleansed, clothed, warmed and fed, and brought him back to London with me, another item to be considered; another link in a soon-to-be-found wonderful chain. The day after my return I was dining with a friend at Blackheath. Dinner over, with a consequent adjournment to the host's study for a smoke and a chat, my attention was drawn to a large engraving, evidently very old, over the chimney piece, and which I certainly had never before seen there, or, indeed, anywhere.

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A large, open boat, with half-a-dozen people in it, filled nearly the whole of the picture space. In the water, on the side of the boat nearest to the spectator, appeared the enormous head, and more than half the body of an immense alligator. Its jaws were only kept from being completely snapped down upon the left leg of a man, by a vigorous thrusting of the latter's left arm down the creature's throat. The man's right hand clung to the boat's gunwale, and frantic efforts were being made by a big nigger, naked to the waist, to aid the alligator's victim.

Underneath the print was a brief descriptive note in French and English. This set forth that the sufferer was one Henry Lyndsaye, and that it was to his personal slave, Romeo (the nigger of the picture), that he owed his rescue, and subsequent restoration to life and health.

Thus I had, within the period of but a few days, become acquainted, co-incidentally almost, with three distinct things, all pointing to, and proving one particular circumstance.

The circumstance was in itself, perhaps, nothing more than a mere traditionary story of adventure, although the tale was, to my mind at least, removed far out of the ordinary run of such yarns, by reason of my own descendantal connection with Henry Lyndsaye, and his mother, the writer of the letter.

Perhaps, too, I ought at this point to mention a matter, which, in the light of after events, has no slight bearing upon general issues.

My great-grandfather, General Calthorpe Lyndsaye, was, in the year of 1760, Governor of Jamaica.

A rich man by inheritance, he had added to his wealth by judicious sugar-planting, and by sundry other ways and means, better, I take it, left untalked-about here.

It seems that when the General died, which he did in or about 1768 (his wife having pre-deceased him by nearly two years) leaving two sons (the elder of whom, though being suspected of being alive, had mysteriously disappeared six years previously) his large fortune running, it is said, well into six figures, became hopelessly locked up, the will definitely leaving everything without any reservation whatever, to Henry Lyndsaye the eldest son.

It came about, therefore, that the second son, Jasper, failed, right up to his death, to establish his claim to all, or any portion of his father's estate; Chancery, eventually opening wide its mighty man to absorb the tempting morsel.

Attempts were made at different times, and by divers persons to get the impounded money, but without success; and at the present period when I first became cognisant of its somewhat visionary legal existence, the representatives of the family had long ceased to express

He had got up alongs'de the kerb towards which I had beckoned him, and stood shivering in the cold.

Persuade your best friend to read "The Golden Dwarf."

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belief, or to take any interest in the "hid treasure." I may add that I am, to-day, the acknowledged head of the Lyndsayes, and am, therefore, entitled to take first action, should action be at any time necessary.

Up to now I had seen no reason for formulating and presenting any claim to the High Court for the resumption by me of the accumulated millions that it was supposed must now be lying in the name of Calthorpe Lyndsaye, late Major General, and Governor of Jamaica.

Probably, nay certainly, I should still have been of the same opinion, and have gone down to my grave holding it, but for this triple discovery, this letting in of light upon a subject that I had agreed upon with myself to bury out of sight.

My friend Zartway at Blackheath, had, at my especial request, lent me for a few days the engraving that had so much interested me on the day that I had last dined with him. I had it taken to my study, and then, on the 15th day of January, 1899, I began my investigations.

It was the letter of old Dame Mahetabel that first claimed my attention.

It had been written evidently to a female friend in London—someone with whom the writer was well acquainted, and who had intimate knowledge of the family and its affairs.

After a few preliminary conventional courtesies, Mrs. Lyndsaye proceeds to tell how in the early morning of a certain day, Henry Lyndsaye, as was his wont, had gone down to the landing-stage, and leaving his clothes thereon, had swam out to a distance of a hundred yards or so from the shore.

Suddenly he was attacked by a huge alligator (twenty feet in length, according to the old lady, but the measurement is open to question) who succeeded in obtaining a partial grip of his left thigh. This, the monster would doubtless have been able to dissever, but for an heroic effort on the part of young Lyndsaye, who contrived to thrust his left arm down the brute's throat, and keep it there, so preventing complete dismemberment.

Despite his agony and terror, the young fellow managed to raise his voice in a piteous cry for help. This was heard by his own personal slave and henchman, Romeo, a gigantic negro, devotedly attached to his young master, and who had come down to the landing stage to look for him.

Romeo at once gave the alarm, and in a few minutes a boat, manned by the faithful "black" and half a dozen whites, friends and sympathisers, put off, and moved out to the spot where, in the semi-darkness, the deadly struggle still continued.

Romeo masterfully assumed the direction of affairs, no man forbidding him.

There is some mysterious, inexplicable force in the look which a negro, a full-blooded negro, casts upon you at times. In the region where Obi prevails this is even the more especially so.

So now. Romeo bent down from his great height, and peered intently and silently into the alligator's small red eyes, upturned as in devilish triumph to his own; the cruel, half-closed snout forming as ugly a picture as could well be of Nature in her most repulsive mood.

Just whispering in the ear of the now almost exhausted man: "Courage! Mass' Harry! Romeo'll do 'um!" the black reached down his long, muscular and naked arm underneath the creatures hinder-part, and with a rapid and powerful swing upwards, literally turned the alligator over on to its back, making it describe a veritable summersault.

Surprise and rage caused a momentary relaxing of the hideous jaws; and before the brute could resume its hold, willing hands had lifted the now inert body of Henry Lyndsaye into the boat.

The document goes on to describe, in quaint phraseology, which I have ventured to transcribe into modern vernacular, how that three physicians took the case in hand, at an expense in fees alone, so says the record, of over £700.

Merely saying that the patient in due course recovered, the writer winds up her statement with a fervent expression of thanks to "the Giver of all Good, for His great mercy in thus protecting an Estimable Young Man, the joy of his Parents and Friends, from the Powers of Evil, and from a Cruel Death."

So much for the letter of Dame Mehetabel Lyndsaye.

Were there no more to be found in it, it would simply be an ordinary or extraordinary story of perilous adventure, describable in a few brief sentences, and needing but little comment.

But as will presently be seen, the alligator story was a detail merely, a first brick in the building up of a "palace of fortune," which but for it, would probably never have been realised as being even possible.

Romeo, the Romeo of the third generation, was the next, and human document for examination.

The old man was in himself remarkable, inasmuch as he was just upon a hundred years old, and remembered things, in their way every whit as extraordinary as were the reminiscent revelations relating to the Lyndsayes, of his father, the second Romeo, when the century was young.

His first statement was—to me at any rate—startling.

I already knew that Henry Lyndsaye had disappeared, but that he had done so immediately after his restoration to health I was altogether ignorant of.

The suggestion of my Romeo's father, that the young heir had been spirited away at the instance, and with the active connivance of Jasper, the second son, placed the latter's conduct in anything but a favourable light. That he hoped thereby to supplant his brother, and so grasp the greater portion of the wealth designed for the eldest born is certain, while it was as certain that he was quite unaware of the existence of the will, which completely disinherited him, and which gave as a reason the evil course of his life from boyhood upward.

Anyway Henry vanished, and from the day that he did so, never was seen again.

Every now and then rumour would assert him to be alive and well—somewhere, but where, rumour said not, with its usual brave vagueness, not condescending to detail. It was idle, general gossip, as worthless as it was unauthorised.

Then the General died, and there being no living representative of Henry Lyndsaye to be found, the property, as has been stated, was thrown into Chancery, there to accumulate if no claim was established to it, for the sole use and benefit of the Government in time of stress or emergency.

Could legal proof of Henry's death have been obtainable, then the next heir would naturally have succeeded; but such was not forthcoming (as I believe, providentially in order that villainy might not reap its unjust reward,

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and that after many days, right might reign) and so, the law being unsatisfied without it, and there being no prospect of its production in the near future, all interested had to be content as far as in them lay.

My own father, a moody, reserved man, and who never at any time educated me in the family history, kept religiously out of sight (that is, out of my sight) anything and everything that would have fostered in me the spirit of curiosity. It was only, indeed, when old Romeo, by certain things he told me, made me to see my position in almost its right light, that I at last suspected myself to be the real descendant of the Henry Lyndsaye aforesaid.

Romeo, who, when I met him in Southampton, had but just been discharged from the Hants County Hospital as an incurable pulmonary case, said that he recollected once how that his father had told him of a suspicion he had that Master Henry would be found in a certain little town in Holland, where, for some reason best known to himself, he lived secluded and alone, and where he, without doubt, ultimately died. Why he did this, why even he went there at all, is a mystery, of which no man knows the solution, or ever will know in this dispensation. How Romeo number two got the idea of Henry Lyndsaye's Dutch residence into his head it is hard to say. My own theory is that he had had a secret communication from his old master himself, and so had not a suspicion merely, but an absolute knowledge on the point.

Wasting no time I started that night for Amsterdam, and by noon the next day after my arrival was prosecuting inquiries in the office of the genial little notary of a village not a hundred miles from the "Palace in the Wood." It was the last thread I was gathering up, the last link I was forging.

Meinherr Schundel over convinced that I was the man I claimed to be, produced a mass of documentary evidence, left him, with the notarial business, by his late father, and to the latter by the grandfather of the firm's present representative, said papers having been deposited by Henry Lyndsaye some years before his death, the Meinherr Schundel of that day being the exile's legal adviser, and, indeed, only friend. In him he had confided, and when he died left him executor to his testamentary wishes.

Among the papers was one added by Schundel, which had it been produced earlier would materially have affected individual lives and fortunes, the certificate of Henry's death.

As a legal necessity, it was of course, now of no value, as no Court in the world would in 1899 dispute the fact of the death of the man born about 1740.

Once and for ever then, it was established that I, Henry Calthorpe Lyndsaye was the true and only living descendant of the Henry Lyndsaye, who, in the year 1760, experienced so terrible an adventure off St. Annes, Port Royal, Jamaica. "Never despise the day of small things," so says the proverb, it is homely but wise.

For me it has a more than ordinary significance, and when I think as I often do now-a-days, of how the casual unearthing of a long-forgotten letter set the ball a-rolling, which will, so my legal advisers inform me, result in the course of a few months, in my undisputed accession to a princely fortune, I am more than ever disposed to echo the sentiment, and to look upon nothing in this world as being too small for consideration and respect.

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BIG JACK'S OUTBREAK.

. . A Convict Story. . .

THERE were those who said that convict 1280 was innocent of the crime which sent him to prison for such a long term of years that there was scarce a hope of his ever being a free man again. They meant that he was technically guilty. He had sought to save a woman from a beating at the hands of her husband, and in the struggles and excitement he had struck a blow which caused the death of the man. It was an accident in a sense, but it was also manslaughter.

"Big Jack," as the convict was sometimes referred to, was like most big men—a child in his gentleness and good nature. He went to prison weeping. He did not complain, but he grieved. He thought of the years and years which must drag away before the prison doors would open to him, and he moved about like a weak old man.

The prison officials felt to pity him, but a convict is a convict and all must be treated alike—all who show obedience to the rules. They sized him up as child-like and good-natured, and yet they said to each other as they talked of him:

"Look out for Big Jack. He will break loose some day and do some desperate thing."

They thought it would come during the first six months of his term. Then during his second. Then they almost became afraid of him. Men who are slow to anger—who go on grieving, brooding, and bearing a mental burden for weeks and months—are devils when the climax comes.

Big Jack had the management of the trip hammer in the machine shop. Had they put him in the shoe shop or tailor shop he would have rebelled at once. His place was beside the biggest piece of machinery in the shops—two pieces of machinery as it were—"Jack and Trip."

Day by day, week by week, and month by month the ponderous hammer rose and fell, and its blows shook the very earth for yards around, making the convict smile and look proud.

The guards had an eye on him, and kept saying to each other:

"It will come. It is only delayed. When he breaks loose he will kill somebody and have to be killed in turn."

Nearly half of the second year had passed and the giant convict had never even sulked, when one day there came into the shop as sightseers a husband, wife, and little girl four or five years old. Children are seldom seen in prisons, and it is a rare thing that they are taken into the shops in the yards.

If anyone in that prison knew that convict 1280 had a daughter—a fair-haired, handsome child, who could only walk alone when the jury pronounced his verdict of "guilty"—he had forgotten the fact. His wife had visited him as often as visitors were allowed, but the child had never been seen within the grim walls.

Knowing that her husband had killed a man by accident, the wife could bear to see him wearing the horrible stripes of a convict, but to let the child look upon him, to gaze in wonder at the iron bars, to ask why all those men were there—a thousand times no! And so this was the first child Big Jack had seen since the heavy door shut him in.

Father, mother, and child came close to him and gazed at the ponderous hammer with wondering eyes. You would have argued that the sight of the child would have softened the convict's heart and brought tears to his eyes, but it did not. It brought a feeling of madness, of desperation, of frenzy.

To save a woman from a brutal beating at the hands of a drunken, worthless thing not fit to be classed with men, he had struck a blow. A jury had called it murder in the second degree, and he was here in prison on a sentence almost never ending. He had been wronged, and the knowledge of it fired his heart and brought the long-expected outbreak.

With a sudden cry that startled everyone in the noisy shop, Big Jack made a spring forward, seized the child in his arms, and there was a shout of defiance on his lips as he held her at arm's length and glared about him. The mother of the child gasped for breath and staggered back to the wall and sunk down. The father stood staring, as if struck dumb, but presently held out his hands in silent supplication.

Big Jack glowered and muttered a reply. He was a convict—a childless father. He was dead to his child; she was dead to him. He could not make another father's heart ache and throb as his did, but he would secure revenge.

After muttering he was silent. No one cried out. Guards and convicts were seemingly stupified. There was the hum of machinery but not of voices. Convicts turned from forge and anvil and bench and lathe and held their breath. The two shop guards leaned forward in their chairs and looked and looked, but they did not move or cry out.

What will he do with the child?

The two men working at the trip hammer with Big Jack had fallen back. He had control of the machinery which worked it. The answer to the question could be read in his eyes. Men had wronged him under cover of the law. He had been deprived of liberty, degraded, and disgraced.

Death were more merciful than such a sentence as his, and in dying he would secure revenge. A piece of metal had been left under the hammer. There was the sound of "crash! crash! crash!" as the mass of iron rose and fell at regular intervals—the sound above the monotonous hum of the machinery.

"He will thrust her under the hammer!"

So thought each guard and each convict. So thought the father, whose feet seemed chained to the floor and whose face was whiter than the dead. One of the guards could have touched a button and signalled the engineer to shut off steam, but he did not move a hand. Either guard had a fair mark to shoot at, but their pistols were not lifted.

Up and down, up and down went the hammer, but suddenly the belt was thrown over on the loose pulley and the mass rested on the anvil. It seemed to those who looked as if they had been looking through a mist, such a mist as rises from the earth of a summer's morning. It seemed to them that this mist thinned out, cleared away before the influence of a rising sun, and by and by they saw the child nestling on Big Jack's

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hairy breast, one hand smoothing his cheek, and, seeming to come from a long distance off, they heard her childish voice saying:

"No, you wouldn't hurt Nellie—you wouldn't hurt Nellie! What makes you cry? Have you a little girl, too? Won't they let you go home and see your little girl?"

And the convicts advanced step by step, and the guards crept forward, and lo! Big Jack's tears were falling, and he hugged the child more tightly and kissed her hair and rosy cheek. There was silence yet—silence as he walked to and fro and wept and kissed and lifted the child till she could clasp her tiny arms about his neck and rest her cheek against his. Not a whisper among the convicts—not a move from father or mother or the guards.

By and by Big Jack placed the child in her father's arms, wiped the tears from his eyes on his striped jacket, and with a "God bless the little darling!" and a "Thank ye, sir!" he returned to his work, and the hammer was lifted and held in waiting for the hot iron to be placed on the anvil beneath.

The guards motioned for the other convicts to go back to their benches and forges, and a minute later the visitors had gone, and work was in full blast. The long-expected outbreak had come and gone.

A POINT OF HONOUR.

The military-police patrol was out.

It was on the stroke of "eleven," and Knightsbridge, where the 'buses stop just opposite Lord Strathnairn's equestrian statue, was lively, as it always is at this time of night. The "patrol" consisted of two privates and a sergeant.

According to custom, they visited, one after another, the various public-houses in the neighbourhood in search of "defaulters."

One establishment, especially, appeared to have more than the usual official attraction for them, through its several entrances the "guard" successively passed, making a searching round of each crowded compartment (it was Saturday night), but without meeting with that for which they were evidently and particularly looking.

This operation was repeated two or three times, but with the same result.

"Ain't 'ere," said Private Tom Jones to his mate, as the three came out on to the wet, greasy pavement for the last time. "Where to, Sergeant?"

Sergeant Halliwell did not reply for the moment.

Puzzled, and vexed at his non-success, he was inclined to be a bit irritable.

"Down Sloane Street," he at length growled, and down Sloane Street the trio accordingly moved at a slow walking pace.

The two privates kept up a low-voiced conversation, the sergeant following at their heels in dignified, if somewhat sulky silence.

"Rum 'e wasn't in the 'Clock House,'" said Tom Jones, "they says as she always meets 'im there about this time."

"She! Who?" queried Private Wallis.

"Why, I dunno; some says as it's 'is missus, as 'e spliced 'off the strength'; an' some says as it's 'is sister, but that's gammon; you don't give up yer walk-out every time to yer sister, does yer? 'Tain't likely!"

"No," replied Wallis, "'tain't likely. I'll bet it's 'is missus."

"Well, it may be or it mayn't," said the other, "the p'int is where's 'e now? It's rum as 'e shouldn't be there to-night, jest when 'e's wanted so badly, ain't it?"

"I suppose it's right as 'e oughtn't to 'ave bin out to-night?" asked Wallis.

"'Course not; 'e's under fourteen days 'C.B.' Desertion, that's wot it amounts to," said Tom Jones, a trifle sententiously.

"Well, I 'opes as we don't spot 'im," said Wallis, forgetting caution, and speaking rather more loudly than was prudent.

"Oh! you do, do you?" snapped the sergeant from behind. "If I hear anything like that again, you'll toe the mark in the orderly-room to-morrow morning, Private Wallis, and don't you forget it. Shut up both of you, and keep your lamps trimmed."

The delinquents drew themselves up to "attention," grips their "swaggers" tighter, and at once became "wooden" men in obedience to order.

Private Harold Daubigny was a "gentleman ranker;" one, too, of the most pronounced of the class.

Of course he was a failure (they most of them are, socially, that is), a failure of the sort that seldom or never gets head above water.

The thing that specially led to his applying for "Her Majesty's shilling" was reprehensible, certainly, though not particularly "out and out." It was on this wise.

Harold Daubigny was the heir-presumptive to one of the oldest baronetcies in the kingdom; being next in succession to his elder brother, a sickly man whose days were nearly numbered.

His father had been dead these many years, his mother, the late Sir Gaspard's widow, living mostly with her two sons (her only children) at the country seat of the family in Kent.

Rare visits to London broke the monotony of life at Tower Crecy, the most perfect of all the many beautiful historic houses in the garden county, or, for the matter of that, in Great Britain.

The Tower Crecy estate had come into the family by marriage in Queen Anne's time, the lady whose dower it was having been a noble ward of the Crown, and a "Lady of the Bedchamber" to Marlborough's Royal mistress.

It was her wealth that had turned a poor family into a rich one. The first holder of the title, one of James I.'s batch of baronets, having been near of kin to the traditionary church mouse.

Now, young Harold, the hero of this little true history, had in him but a very small share, if any, of the family "cuteness." He was all for pleasure; the passing hour, and how to lounge it away; the sunny side of life, and how to secure it; for these objects, and these alone, he existed and schemed.

But time-killing is a costly pursuit, that sooner or later lands the individual in either the Bankruptcy Court or in that which is every whit as bad the slough of social ostracism.

Persuade your best friend to read "The Golden Dwarf."

The latter is always the most unpleasant, for the reason that "Society" is ruthless, and never forgets.

His money gone—wasted; his reversionary interests mortgaged up to the hilt, and in some instances sold outright, there was but one end possible to it all.

His mother, who worshipped him (it is ever the scapegrace who gets the mother-bestowed "Benjamin's mess"); had pleaded day and night long almost, but without avail.

The bit once between his teeth, he would not be restrained; was soon far beyond the reach of remonstrance and control.

Still, he was not all bad. Once face to face with the end of the tether, he, like the prodigal of old, came to himself, and to his right mind, a feeling of intense self-shame swept over him, and—he fled.

A visit to the recruiting depôt at St. George's Barracks; a brief interview with a complaisant sergeant-major of the Foot Guards; a rapid, but satisfactory medical examination, and magisterial attestation, and Harol Daubigny passed out of his own "set," into the society of Tommy Atkins.

All this happened eighteen months or more before the period of the episode in his career herein related.

Officers, it is well known, have a rooted dislike to the "gentleman ranker," and for obvious reasons.

Harold Daubigny was no exception to the rule, for his high spirit, his aristocratic contempt for authority, and his reckless disregard of discipline, both moral and military, brought him into frequent and unpleasant collision with the "powers that were."

It seems that three days before the night initially referred to, he had been sentenced to "Confinement to barracks" for fourteen days for insubordinate conduct on parade.

Early in the evening in question he had been missed; and as his haunts and habits were at least more than suspected, the ordinary street "patrol" were instructed to keep a special look-out for him.

It was known that that morning he had received a letter which had appeared to considerably disturb him.

All through the day his comrades had observed that he was uneasy, and more than usually irritable, although there was no official suspicion that he would attempt to "break barracks."

It was therefore thought that there might possibly be a connection of some sort between the letter and his escapade. Anyway, it was technical desertion, and as such, must be promptly punished.

All very well, but the cooking of the hare must, undoubtedly be preceded by its capture.

So with Harold. The cooks were ready; but of the hare not a sign was to be seen or heard.

In one way this was not surprising, as his real name was unknown in the regiment, he having enlisted in the name of Henry Shaw.

Still, the military authorities thought he ought to be found (they never admit the possibility of failure in their subordinates) and "combed" unmercifully the unfortunate patrol sergeant for not finding him.

* * * * *

"Tower Crecy" is a landmark for miles; the central keep with its flagstaff and machicolated battlements rising well above the wooded land surrounding the buildings on every side.

The village of the same name nestles near the gates, forming, with its noble neighbour, a charmingly picturesque example of bygone simplicity and grandeur.

Up the long, dusty road from Canningford station, in the dim dawn of the winter's morning, trudged a figure, clad in a long ulster and a golf cap.

A quarter of an hour later, and the lodge-keeper saw the same man pass rapidly through, and along the drive leading to the house.

There was not time to stop him, and enquire his business, even had she been able for the stranger was energetic, and the lodge-keeper old and rheumatic.

"Go round to the back. You've no bus——"

"Get out, Byles. I'm going up to my mother's room. Is Miss Cicely there?"

"I beg pardon, Mr. Harold. I didn't know——"

"Never mind that. Answer my question."

"Yes, sir, Miss Cicely has just gone up to my lady's room. Can I get you any——"

With a bound, Harold was past the butler, and in a moment was at the door of his mother's room.

What should he see? He was afraid, this "six-feet-three" guardsman, to face the possibility of death.

Then, while he hesitated, the door gently opened, and his cousin Cicely, the adopted daughter of the house, stood in the entrance way.

Harold's cap had fallen off, disclosing his fair, curly head, while his outer coat, now unbuttoned, revealed beneath it "Her Majesty's scarlet."

"Harold! You had my letter, then? Hush! Come in and close the door. See, you are only just in time."

It was not a cry; it was a wail of bitter remorse and anguish.

"Mother!"

The big fellow dropped on his knees by the bed and buried his face in the coverlet, the sobs, which shook him from head to foot, making the very room to tremble.

Presently a thin, white hand stole out from above him, and sought his head. Cicely saw it and went out, leaving the mother and son together.

No one knows what passed within that death-chamber, only that when Cicely returned a little later she found the dead mother with her hand still upon her boy's head as if invoking a blessing.

* * * * *

The morning after the funeral a soldier passed through the gate of Wellington Barracks to be immediately challenged by the sergeant of the guard.

When brought before the Colonel, he was asked what he had to say in his own defence.

"Not much, sir. Just this. I broke my mother's heart—God forgive me! and—I have just returned from her grave side."

"Yes, very sad, no doubt, but you should know that the true point of honour is to be faithful to your colours."

"Colonel, I'd fight for King and country like a devil! but the point of honour with me being a last look of the face of the mother, whose life I had made to be one long sorrow. I have only to say that I don't regret it, and would do the same again if I had to be shot for it!"

* * * * *

Punished, of course he was, but he had gained a place in the estimation, both of his officers and of his comrades, that as long as he wears uniform (and he has no intention of quitting soldiering) he will not readily lose.

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CHAPTER I.

WHEN the Mayor of Uptown Station lost his mother bets were freely taken in the township as to whether he would marry.

Everybody knew that he had made up his mind to remain single as long as the old lady, who idolised him, was alive. It was just like his unselfish good nature. Now that she was gone, we were on the tip-toe of expectation to find out how great his sacrifice had been. We were all romantic in Uptown Station, and the chance of discovering a hidden love story in the history of Tom Carwithen made the whole settlement excited.

I was one of the unfortunate people who gave long odds that the Mayor would marry within a year, and I lost twenty pounds over the business.

For the year went by, and no sign of a romance peeped out in the life of Tom Carwithen, the most popular man in Uptown Station.

I felt quite aggrieved about it, and told him he ought to pay me over twenty pounds.

Carwithen laughed.

"I am awfully sorry," he said, "but who was I to marry?"

"Why surely you used to be in love once, in the old country; perhaps before you came out here?"

"I don't remember ever experiencing the sensation!"

"On your honour?"

"On my honour!"

I knew then that Tom Carwithen was, for a man of thirty, a phenomenon. For there was no doubting the word of our Mayor, who had been elected again, as usual. When he solemnly said a thing, you might take it for gospel.

I was startled to hear, therefore, not three months after this declaration of his, that Tom Carwithen was going to marry a lady from England. Old Lamont, the store-keeper, gave me the news. He and Carwithen had emigrated together from the same town, and he happened to know the girl.

"Belle Aruth and Tom were playfellows together in York," said Lamont over his counter, beaming with the satisfied consciousness that he was the best informed man in the place on a subject of such popular interest. "I remember seeing them playing together there about twenty years ago now. She'd be five or six, and he a year or two older. Old Aruth had a shop in Coney Street—cornchandler's or something—and when Tom's father died, he took an interest in the lad and took him on, first as errand boy and then as shop boy. He was the making of him, Carwithen always says. You've heard him talk about old Aruth?"

"Yes, but I never knew he had a daughter."

"And I never thought Tom cared for her. I suppose she wouldn't marry, like him, while her old people wanted looking after. Old Aruth is just dead, I believe."

"Well, old Aruth has robbed me of twenty pounds, by not dying a little sooner," I said. "I shall want a little explanation from Tom Carwithen concerning this, and I went straight to the Mayor's big house to demand it."

"Look here, Carwithen," I said, "you told me you had never been in love!"

The Mayor appeared rather worried, I thought. He looked up almost angrily.

"Well?"

"And you were waiting all the while to marry your boy-love, as soon as the coast was clear. It seems to me, old man, the nearest thing to a lie I've ever heard from you, and six years we've been chums together."

The Mayor pushed me his cigar box.

"Lamont told you, I suppose?"

"Yes; did you tell him?"

"No, he got it from friends in York. But it is true enough that I am going to marry Miss Aruth. I guess Lamont has spread it all over the township by now!"

"He is doing solid business in that direction. The only thing that made me think his news was wrong was the talk we had a month or two ago."

"When I said I had never been in love?"

I nodded.

"Well it was true enough."

"But you haven't had much chance of forming an attachment since then?"

The Mayor puffed steadily at his cigar.

"Well, I suppose I had better tell you the truth of the matter," he said, after a few minutes' pause, during which I suppose he had been considering the question. "You can let out a little, judiciously, to the boys, too,

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or else they'll be looking at me and my marriage in far too romantic a light, which would make it unpleasant for both of us. The truth is that my marriage to Miss Aruth is not the result of an old love affair exactly. We were always good friends, and I never thought of marrying Belle till her father died. I owe everything I am or have to that man, you know. When he died, a few months ago, he left nothing behind him, and he wrote to me almost in his last moments, begging me to see that his daughter did not want. He was unable to make any provision for her, and she had no friends, unless I would prove myself one. Of course, there wasn't a moment's question on the score."

"Yes, but seeing that a girl does not want does not necessarily imply that you must marry her," I said, feeling a good deal disappointed to find that good Tom Carwithen seemed as intent on self-sacrifice as ever.

Tom took a puff at his Havana.

"If you think the thing out, you'll see that it does imply marrying," he said deliberately; "it is the only satisfactory way of doing it. At any rate, I thought so and wrote back at once, and asked Miss Aruth if she would come out here and be Mayoress. I did not, of course, pretend to be in love. I said we had always been good friends, and had no doubt we should make each other happier."

"And she accepted promptly?" I interrupted.

"She wrote me a very nice letter by return, thanking me, and saying she would come out if I wished it, and marry me. She arrives in three weeks time, by the *White Lion*. I shall meet her of course at Melbourne."

"Very promptly arranged," I said whistling. "I hope you'll like it old man."

"Thanks. So do I," said Tom gloomily, with the ghost of a twinkle in his eye, all the same. Then he got up and laid his hand on my arm. "Look here, old fellow," he said earnestly, "I've been telling things to you to-night, that I wouldn't tell anybody else in the world. I feel a mean sneak telling you, but I felt I must have a little real sympathy from someone; and I want you to spread an impression—I would rather hang myself than let you tell the boys I am marrying like I am——"

"From generosity," I interposed.

"Well, call it what you like; but you must not tell anybody. Only, you might spread it round that my marriage is more or less a business arrangement. I could not stand everybody getting romantic over it, nor, I am sure, would Miss Aruth like it."

"All right old man; you may depend upon me giving the exact impression," I said; and I set about doing it at once.

But I found it pretty hard work toning down the enthusiasm of Uptown Station over the marriage of their Mayor. They began right away, making presentations, and arrangements for public celebrations on a big scale. There was no restraining their exuberance. The township had come to the conclusion that the occasion called for a grand effort, and it rose to the performance of its duty like a man. It was only by argument that the Mayor was allowed to go to Melbourne alone to meet his bride-elect. The popular wish was to send the whole town council with him, in full civic dress—and we boasted some remarkable civic dresses at Uptown Station—to receive Miss Aruth in a manner befitting her future position as wife of our popular Mayor. I voted dead against it, of course; but it was only with the greatest difficulty that Carwithen got off by himself, and the disappointed council set to work at once, running up elaborate triumphal arches for his return.

CHAPTER II.

The *White Lion* was expected to arrive on a Sunday. Carwithen was to meet the lady on board, conduct her to her hotel, and bring her next day to Uptown Station, where the wedding was to take place on the same afternoon, with all the pomp and glory that the township could think of. Everybody was wild with excitement to see the happy woman who had secured Carwithen and when on the Monday the couple arrived, they found the decorated streets full of people. I suppose every able-bodied person in Uptown station was in the crowd which followed Carwithen and his bride-elect under the triumphal arches and bedecked clothes-lines from the station to the hotel, where they rested, and from the hotel to the church. At the hotel I had to give an address of welcome on behalf of the town, to the lady, and a very good opportunity of forming an opinion on her charms.

On the whole it was a very favourable one. Her hair was of a shade which I had always associated in my mind with hair-dye; and even under her veil, her black eyebrows lent support to the idea that she understood cosmetics; but there was something very sweet and girlish in her voice, manner and figure, which won my admiration at once, and knocked 75 per cent. off the feeling of pity with which I had been regarding poor Carwithen. Old Lamont had privately told me—and everybody else in the township—that Miss Aruth was no beauty. From his remembrance of her, and a description which his York friends had sent, he had managed to conjure up in my mind the image of a bony and masculine person, with a large nose and a cast in her eye.

The lady to whom I had to present the address of welcome formed a very pleasing contrast to this imaginary personage. Perhaps it was the contrast and surprise which made me fall in love with her at sight—as much in love that is, as a man may honestly be with the wife of his chum.

When the ceremony at church was over and I got the opportunity of speaking to old Lamont, I took him to task roundly for spreading such a misleading description of our future mayoress throughout the township. I did not speak quite as severely as I had intended to do, however, because I found a score of men at him on the same point.

"My dear friend," said Lamont smiling blandly, and addressing himself to me as the latest opponent, "allow me to explain. It was desirable, wasn't it, that the lady should creat a favourable impression when she arrived? You agree. Well, if I had accurately described all her charms, you might all have been a little disappointed at the reality. Instead of saying, 'What a charming figure!' you would have grumbled that she dyed her hair"—Lamont had evidently the same opinion as myself about the bride's golden tresses—"now you are all pleased, because she is better instead of worse than what you expected."

There was a grand guffaw at this piece of worldly wisdom on the old storekeeper's part, and the score of men went away apparently satisfied. But I knew

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Lamont better than they, and put my arm in his as we marched off to the wedding feast at the town hall.

"Look here, Lamont," I said, "your explanation is good enough for men who don't know you, but I'll eat my hat if you weren't in earnest when you described Miss Aruth as a gawky fright, with dull black hair and a squint."

"That is so," said Lamont.

"Then how do you account for the transformation?"

"She was crouching there among the shrubs where she had been hiding ever since her escape from the hotel."

"Hush," said my companion, dropping his own voice to almost a whisper; "I am as puzzled as you, my boy, and a good deal more so, although I did not care to tell the other fellows. As you say, I was in dead earnest when I described Carwithen's girl; and I'll eat a whole hat-shop if the woman Tom married just now is Belle Aruth, of York. Why, I remember that girl as well as I remember anybody. I saw her when I went my trip home, five years ago, and she had black hair, a squint, and a bottle nose. It was certainly five years ago, and she may have changed a little in the time, and, of course, a woman can do a good deal with cosmetics; but my sister in York sent me a full description of her and a photograph, and they both make her out just the woman Belle Aruth would grow into. We have plenty of time before we begin; come in and see the photograph."

We were passing his store, as he spoke, and I followed him inside and upstairs to his parlour, thoroughly interested in the old man's bewilderment. The photograph did not make Miss Aruth quite so plain as his description. The squint was only a slight one, and the rather large nose gave character to a face full of determination. But the face and figure were certainly not those of the lady who had just been married.

"Your friends in York must have made a mistake and sent the portrait of the wrong personage?" I suggested; but the storekeeper shook his head.

"It is impossible. My sister lives in the same street with the Aruth's and got the news from the girls herself; and besides, I saw her myself only five years ago."

"Then, what do you think? Has some adventuress been practising a fraud on poor Carwithen, and passed herself off to him as the woman he had agreed to marry?"

"Tom does not suffer if she has," said Lamont, energetically. He was evidently prejudiced against Miss Aruth.

"And what do you propose doing?" I asked next.

The storekeeper threw the photo into the fire.

"Nothing!" he said, promptly. "Whoever this lady may be, Tom Carwithen has married her, and if you can judge anything by appearances, she will make him a better wife than the *bona-fide* Belle. If he has been cheated, I am not going to open his eyes. If he knows what he is about, I don't want to interfere with his affairs. Trouble enough to mind my own. Come along. We must not be late, as we have both healths to propose."

"But you have been showing that photo all round the place, haven't you?" I said, as we passed through the store again, on our way out. "How shall you explain the photo?"

"As you heard me just after the wedding. It was a happy idea of mine, and will satisfy most people, I think. The rest will have to remain unsatisfied."

CHAPTER III.

I CANNOT deny that Lamont's assurances made me very uneasy. It seemed impossible that he could be mistaken. Besides, I had heard from Tom Carwithen himself that Miss Aruth's age was only a few years less than his own, and the lady with whom he had gone through the ceremony of marriage looked scarcely twenty. I wished that I could feel as satisfied as the old storekeeper about my duty in the matter, and be content to let things take their course without my interference. But I could feel none of Lamont's confidence. Was it a friendly thing to do, I kept asking myself, if my chum had been cheated, to stand by and give him no enlightenment?

If the sweet-faced woman, who had taken my fancy so, was proved to have married the Mayor by passing

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herself off as another woman, under that other woman's name, surely the marriage was not a legal one, and could easily be annulled. If I had not heard such an unfavourable opinion of the real Miss Aruth, I should not have hesitated to tell Carwithen all I knew. But from all I heard, I thought the Mayor might come off worse by keeping himself free for that young lady than by sticking to the fair pretender, whose appearance had certainly prepossessed me in her favour. So I let the day go by and said nothing, behaving at the wedding feast in the Town Hall as if everything was as it should be.

It was not a very merry business, however, in spite of the labour and expense which the town had expended on it. The bridegroom seemed to make himself gay by an effort, and Mrs. Carwithen was pale and nervous throughout the whole affair. I, for one, was devoutly pleased when it was all over, and I was left free to go home and wonder what on earth I ought to do.

I was foolish enough to go on wondering after I went to bed, with the result that I did not get a wink of sleep all night, which I might not have regretted if I had found myself any nearer a solution of the question in the morning, but I was as far away as ever.

You may guess how glad I was, then, when Jack Elliott dropped in to breakfast.

Elliott was the very man of all others whom I would have chosen to consult over poor Carwithen's business. He was as much the Mayor's friend as I was, and he could see further through a mystery than most men; as he ought to do, seeing that he was Chief of the Melbourne police. The Mayor's influence—and his own abilities—had secured him the post when he left Uptown Station.

He had coolly given my housekeeper orders to bring in double breakfast, and was calmly attacking the meal when I came down, all the worse for my sleepless night. It would have surprised me to see any other man, whom I had imagined 200 miles away, sitting at my table, but nothing surprised me about Jack Elliott. It was just like him—pouncing upon a fellow whom he had not seen for a year, and nodding coolly, as if he had met him an hour before.

I had learnt the Chief's way, and acknowledged his presence with nothing more than a smile and a nod till I had cracked my egg. Then I ventured to remark:

"Down here on business?"

Elliott took a sip of coffee.

"Partly," he said. "I am having a holiday, but there is an interesting little case which I am looking after at the same time, just to pass the time."

"A fraud?" I asked.

"A murder. You have heard of it, of course—the murder at Lean's Hotel?"

"Oh! yes it was in the papers. A rich Melbourne man was murdered in his bedroom at the hotel, by a woman, whose acquaintance he had made. She escaped."

"Exactly so. I mean to find her. After finding out a little of her history, I marked down six places she might try to reach. I shall take a little holiday tour through the lot."

"And has Uptown Station the honour of coming first?" I asked.

"No; it is not on the list. I just came here on the way to see you and old Carwithen. Is he all right?"

"Is it possible you have not heard?"

"What?"

"That he is married."

"Gracious! No! What has he done with his mother, then?"

"Buried her! You are more than a year behind date."

"Yes, that is the worst of forswearing friendly correspondence and newspapers. They both interfere with business. But to whom has Tom given the best husband in the market?"

Whereupon I told him the whole story.

"Oh! yes," he said, when I had finished, "it sounds as though there may be something interesting in it. I'll find out who the lady is. And, meanwhile, you had better say nothing about it to Carwithen. If I am lucky, I'll give you his wife's genealogy in full to-morrow. Meanwhile, I may as well have a look round at her, if she is in town still."

"Yes. They are having no honeymoon. Carwithen is too busy, he says."

"Then I will call. You may expect me to-morrow to supper."

And till supper-time next day I did not catch a glimpse of my friend, the Melbourne policeman.

He came in with his usual air of expressionless calm, just as the meal was ready, and nodded to me as he sat down in his chair at the other side of the table.

"Well, have you discovered anything?" I asked, eagerly, when he was seated.

Elliott nodded.

"Is it Miss Aruth that Tom has married?"

"No."

"Who on earth is she then?"

Jack Elliott looked straight across at me.

"She is a Miss Dorothy West—the woman who murdered Mr. Langley five days ago at Lean's Hotel."

I started up from my chair.

"What! the woman you are searching for?"

Elliott nodded.

"And Tom Carwithen has married her?"

"It appears so."

I burst out laughing.

"Why, man, it is impossible!"

"It is perfectly true," said the policeman. "I recognised her directly I saw her, from a photograph I have with me. But, of course, I made quite sure before telling you. I was in Carwithen's house less than an hour ago, ransacking the place for any stray belongings of the lady. I did not find any, though. Didn't it occur to anybody here that 'Mrs. Carwithen' didn't bring a scrap of luggage with her?"

I had given no thought to the matter, and said so.

"Not a scrap," repeated Elliott. "They are buying everything here, or ordering it from Melbourne. Tom sent off five letters to-day to different firms. Mrs. C. did not even bring a handbag with her. I had to wait till she came home, and to pick her pocket, while I was talking to Tom."

"Pick her pocket? What for?"

"To see the initials on her handkerchief, of course. I was luckier than I expected, for it had her whole name written in the corner—Dorothy West. That is pretty conclusive, eh? And I have other evidence on the point."

"Why, this is terrible!" I said. "Poor old Tom! What are you going to do?"

"Have my supper, if you'll be good enough to carve

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that fowl," said the Chief of the Melbourne police; and he would not say another word about his startling discovery till he had made an excellent meal.

For my part, the news had taken away any chance of my eating; and I was thankful when my companion pushed back his chair from the table.

"I can never come to a decision when I am hungry," he said. "If you'll hand me the cigar-box, we will think out what to do."

"You will arrest her, I suppose?" I said somewhat regretfully.

I could not forget that Jack was a policeman, and the remembrance of Mrs. Carwithen's sweet face made me feel absolutely sick to think of the position in which she was placed.

Elliott took a puff at his cigar.

"It is not certain that I shall make an arrest," he said. "The affair of the murder at Lean's Hotel is not in my hands, you know. But we must find out how our friend the Mayor really stands. I wonder if he knows who his wife really is?"

"Let us go and ask him," I suggested. "We three ought to act as friends in this matter, Elliott."

And, to my surprise, Elliott agreed with me, and accepted my suggestion.

CHAPTER IV.

It was after ten when we got to the Mayor's, and the servants showed some hesitation about admitting us at that hour. The Mayor usually retired at ten, they said; but when we were finally shown into the drawing-room, Carwithen and his wife were both there. The latter was singing to her husband's accompaniment a pathetic little ballad, which we both knew.

"That is not the voice of a murderess," whispered Elliott, before entering, as we stood in the passage with the servant, waiting till the song should be finished; and I thoroughly agreed with him. For the singer had one of those sweet voices which win our hearts instantly.

The music ceased suddenly. They had evidently heard that slight commotion in the hall, and Tom came to the door of the drawing-room, and pushed back the heavy curtains to see what it was.

"What, Elliott, is that you again?" he said, catching sight of my companion first. "Do you want a bed? I forgot to ask you whether we could put you up, when you were here this afternoon."

He led the way into the room as he spoke, and I was quite startled to see how lovely the woman looked, whom my companion called a murderess. She had changed the travelling dress which she wore at the wedding, for a creamy dressing-gown. I suppose she must have improvised it, if Elliott's news about her luggage was true, but nothing could have suited her more perfectly. She looked in it a lovely, ethereal spirit, as she came towards us slowly from the piano. Perhaps she looked all the more spiritual from the fact that her face was perfectly pale, and her great, dark eyes seemed full of fear; but she spoke and acted quite calmly and with a charming grace which seemed natural to her.

It seemed absolutely absurd to me that we could come to accuse such a beautiful creature of a terrible crime. If I had been alone, I should have lacked confidence to go through with the affair.

But Jack Elliott was not so susceptible to womanly charms as I, perhaps; and in the fewest possible words he told Carwithen—who seemed to get more agitated every moment that we had something important to talk over with him, and should like to be alone.

He apologised gracefully to the lady as she left us together, for disturbing her and her husband at such an hour, and in another moment or two we had Carwithen to ourselves.

I had not the heart to watch his expression, nor that of the lady as she left the room, but now that I happened to catch sight of the Mayor's face, it made me feel quite bad to see how nervous and ill he had grown.

Jack Elliott formed his own deduction from the fact, and said, as soon as the door was shut:

"Well, old man, you seem to know what we have come about?"

"Oh, no. I am quite in the dark," said poor Carwithen, with a feeble attempt to appear at ease.

"It is about your wife, then," said the Chief of the Melbourne police.

"Yes?"

The Mayor's voice plainly trembled.

"Come, it is no use pretending, old man," said Jack, with something of his police manner; and, hating to hear my chum tortured, I put in quickly.

"We have found out that your wife is the Melbourne murderess."

Carwithen showed no shock or surprise.

"She is innocent!" he said, with a dogged defiance in his voice.

"Of course," said Elliott with his police manner again, "but the case looks pretty black against her, and I will admit that I should have arrested her on the spot if it were not for the unaccountable fact that you appear to have married her."

Carwithen seemed to jump hopefully at the "if."

"Oh, yes, I have married her," he said, eagerly coming forward.

"You won't send my wife to prison, Jack?"

It struck me that Elliott was beginning to look a trifle uncomfortable for the first time in my experience of him.

"Sit down, man, and let us talk it over calmly," he said. "I am not likely to forget what I owe you. But I certainly shan't let you make a fool of yourself over this business. Suppose you tell us the whole story from beginning to end? We are both in the dark. Where is the real Miss Aruth? How on earth did you pick up this pretty murder—well suspect? And what possessed you to marry her? If you'll take us into your confidence, we'll do the best we can to make things straight for you. If not, of course, I shall have to take the police view that Miss West—or Mrs. Carwithen—is a murderess, and arrest her."

"For God's sake don't do that," pleaded the Mayor, his whole soul in his voice. "I shall be glad to tell you the story from beginning to end and I don't care if you call me a fool for what I have done, as long as you don't spoil my plans."

"Well, start ahead with the story," said Elliott, looking round for the Mayor's cigar-box.

"I will just go and tell my wife what you have come about, first," said Carwithen. "The truth is bad enough. I did not think anybody would imagine, however great the resemblance, that Dorothy West and my wife were one and the same person. But, to know it is found out, is better than suspense. Will you excuse me for a moment?"

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"Certainly," said Elliott, who had taken the matter into his own hands and ignored me; then he added, as the Mayor walked to the door, "Of course, you won't be so silly as to try and spirit the lady away. I assure you it would be very bad policy on your part."

Carwithen conjured up a sickly smile.

"I perceive that perfectly, Jack."

CHAPTER V.

We were both silent while poor Carwithen was out of the room. Elliott discovered the cigar box for which he had been looking lighted one of Tom's Havanas and stretched himself out luxuriously in an easy chair. By the time that he was fairly settled, the Mayor came back looking more haggard than ever. He stood in front of the fire and started his story straight away, He had evidently been arranging it on his way.

"It begins with my going to Melbourne to meet Miss Aruth, whom I had asked to marry me," he said; and Elliott interrupted him.

"Excuse me, you really intended to meet Miss Belle Aruth, and marry her? It was not a blind?"

"Oh, yes, I never dreamed of not meeting or not marrying her, although, as I explained some time ago to our friend here, I did not pretend to be in love with her. I reached Melbourne two days before the *White Lion* was expected, took rooms in the New Hotel, and in order to be quite proper, engaged others at another Hotel for Miss Aruth when she should arrive. The next day I thought I would have a look round the town, which I had not seen for more than three years. I turned into a public park—I forget its name—and sat down on one of the seats to read a Sunday paper, which I had just bought in the street. It contained a full account of the murder at Lean's Hotel. A young lady, found in the room with the corpse, had been accused by the hotel people of being the author of the crime; she had protested her innocence, and in the general excitement over the finding of the body, she had managed to disappear. A rough sketch and a description was given, and the impossibility of her really escaping was enlarged upon. There was a shrubbery behind me, and while I was reading, something made me turn round and look among the bushes. I thought I could see something moving there; and, after taking a look round to see that there were no gardeners or officials about, I took a few steps into the shrubbery to satisfy my awakened curiosity."

"And there you found the suspected woman hiding?" asked Elliott.

"Yes, she was crouching there among the shrubs, where she had been hiding ever since her escape from the hotel. Well, she made no attempt to explain her presence there; she just fell on her knees, begging me to spare her, and not to deliver her up to the police. Then, before I could say anything, she told me she was quite innocent."

"And looked so beautiful that you took her word for it?" said Elliott drily.

"No, Jack. I did not until I had heard her account of it. I made her come out and sit on the seat near me, thinking that would be safer than talking in the shrubbery, and tell me all about it. I will call her and ask her to tell you also, and then you will believe her innocent, as I did."

"Possibly," said Elliott. "But suppose you tell us your story first without troubling Miss West."

"You ought to hear my wife," said Carwithen with a stress on the last word, and he took a step towards the door as if to call her, but Elliott stopped him.

"I shall hear the lady's story with more sympathy, most likely, when I hear what her relationship really is to my friend," he said gravely. "For the present you might give us her statement of the case briefly in your own words."

Carwithen looked unwilling, but he felt, no doubt, that he was in the policeman's hands, and he told us a most remarkable story which the accused woman had given him as an explanation of her position.

According to her own story, Miss Dorothy West was staying a night at Lean's Hotel, before leaving the country on the morrow to seek her fortune as a governess in England. She was quite alone in the world. She was writing till late, and went to bed shortly before midnight. After undressing and blowing out her candle, she discovered that a valuable ring had disappeared from her finger. It was the only memento she retained of her dead father, and the very thought of losing it made her quite miserable. Then, when she tried to recollect where she could have dropped it, or had it stolen, a remembrance flashed back into her mind—as remembrances will do in such cases—of a slight sound she had noticed in coming up the hotel staircase twenty minutes before.

She had stopped a moment then, wondering if she had dropped anything, but seeing nothing in a cursory glance down at the carpet, had proceeded to her room. Now there occurred to her, of course, the hope that the sound had been caused by the falling of her ring, and that the trinket might still be lying on the stairs. If so, of course she ought to secure it before anybody passed. With this intention, the girl slipped on her dressing-gown which she had hung on the door, without relighting her candle.

Then she passed out into the empty corridor outside her room, which was lighted dimly by a gasalier at each end, and down the stairs to the spot where she thought she had heard the ring drop. She did not find it, but was obliged to retreat quickly to her room by hearing steps approaching. She ran back hurriedly, afraid of being seen with bare feet and uncoiled hair, and must have gone into the wrong room, where Mr. Langley was already lying murdered.

She remembered afterwards feeling the carpet wet under her feet, but was so excited at the time by her hurried flight from the approaching steps, that she did not think anything about it, and she was too frightened to venture out again, even for her father's ring. So she lay panting with her exertions till the steps passed her door, and then after lying awake some time, wondering whether she would get her ring back, she fell asleep, and did not wake till she heard a loud battering at her door in the morning. A servant in passing had seen a tiny stream of blood coming under the mat, and had run to call assistance. At the moment that Miss West awoke the butler forced the lock, and half-a-dozen servants burst into the room. The poor girl wakened suddenly, sat up, rubbing her eyes, and inquiring what this extraordinary commotion meant. For reply, she found everybody pointing dumbly at the foot of the bed.

"Where Mr. Langley lay murdered, I suppose?" said

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Jack Elliott, when the Mayor reached this point in his story.

"Yes. He must have been lying there when she entered the room," Carwithen went on. "The poor girl sprang out of bed horror-struck at her position. As she did so, the servants fell away from her, screaming and pointing at her feet. They were stained with blood.

"Well, it was not long, of course, before my wife discovered that she was considered by everybody to have killed the man beside whose corpse she had passed the night. When she realised the impossibility of making anybody believe the true explanation of her presence in his room, she seized an opportunity when she was for a moment unnoticed, to escape from the place before the police who had been summoned had arrived. She took refuge immediately in the park, where I found her, and had remained in that shrubbery hiding. That is my wife's story," Carwithen wound up.

"Why it is the woman who murdered Mr. Langley in Lean's Hotel at Melbourne. Here, policeman, arrest her!"

"Not a bad one," said Jack Elliot, in his dry way. "An exceedingly good one, under the circumstances. The case is certainly interesting."

I thought it was my turn to make a remark.

"You may think what you like, Elliott," I said, "but I, for one, believe that explanation. It is much more easy to believe, than that such a gentle and beautiful woman should commit a terrible crime."

Elliott sniffed and took no further notice of my remark, but poor Carwithen grasped my hand and wrung it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Chief of the Melbourne police selected another cigar and lighted it.

"We have not heard how you proceeded, Carwithen?" he said, and the Mayor went on with his story.

"I can understand you," he went on, "imagining, from hearing my account of it, that the story was a clever invention; but if you had heard it, as I did, from the lady herself, I am sure you would have believed it. I did, thoroughly, and all my sympathies were aroused for this beautiful, friendless girl, who found herself in such a terrible position."

"So you threw Miss Aruth over, and brought the lady here instead?" said Elliott, with a laugh.

"No," said Carwithen quickly; "wait a moment. I told her to remain in hiding in the park, and promised to return with some disguise or other for her to wear. Then I went into the streets, and bought a ready-made dress and other things—all I could think of that a woman would wear—and took them with me to my seat by the shrubbery. I must have looked rather comical idling around the place with half-a-dozen drapers' packages; but, luckily, nobody seemed to notice me, and our part of the park was quite deserted. All my packages went into the shrubbery—and out came a new young lady, not so badly dressed, either, I flatter myself. She wore a veil, so that her face could not be recognised, and walked out of the park arm-in-arm with me. She left her own clothes in the shrubbery."

"But, unfortunately, brought her handkerchief," put in Elliott. "I suppose you forgot to supply that detail?"

"Yes—we never thought of it."

"I did," said the policeman drily; "that was the most important point in my discovery. But I must congratulate you on the idea of walking together. Of course, everybody was looking for the suspect among unaccompanied girls."

"So I thought," said Carwithen. "So I rooted up still another hotel, and took rooms there for 'Mr. and Mrs. Smith,' and sent for a dressmaker to measure 'Mrs. Smith' for a new dress."

"Good," said the police officer.

"Yes, but the worst of it was that the lady who really should belong to me—Miss Belle Aruth—might turn up at any moment. Her arrival would complicate the affair very much."

"Well?"

"I called at the Steamboat Company's office to hear the latest about the *White Lion's* arrival, and was surprised to find a note waiting for me there. It was from Miss Aruth herself. She had changed her mind and come by the *King of France*, so she had actually been in Australia three days when I reached Melbourne.

Persuade your best friend to read "The Golden Dwarf."

She left a note to thank me for my kind intentions with reference to her, and to inform me that she had been better suited, and was about to marry a gentleman whom she had met on the way out and who had proposed marriage. It was the coolest and most comical note in the world; but you may guess how it relieved my mind. Of course, things were still sufficiently arkward. I could not think, for the life of me, what I was to do next. Here was a young girl staying at an hotel in the town as my wife—and what on earth was I to do with her?

"Then I began to think how foolish I should look when I came back to Uptown Station, with all its triumphal arches built for my wedding, and told the boys that I had been jilted. I felt mad about it, although I was glad to know the bride-elect was out of the way. Then, of course, a brilliant inspiration came into my head—a way by which my two puzzles might solve each other. Why not take back 'Mrs. Smith' in Belle Aruth's place? I thought that by making the poor girl my wife, I should remove her from the very possibility of being suspected, and the boys would not be cheated out of a grand wedding. I had a little trouble persuading her, of course, but the poor girl was so distracted by her danger, that I believe she would have agreed to anything. I made sure, of course, that she had no love affair in the way, to prevent her tying herself. Of course I had none.

"Well, after seeing her and arranging everything, I gave out at the hotel that I was leaving Melbourne on business and slept two nights in the room I had originally taken at the New Hotel. Next day we came down here and were married."

Elliott coughed.

"Of course you know the marriage is not a legal one?"

The Mayor started perceptibly.

"Why not, man?"

"Because the lady married you under a false name, and you both knew that it was a false name."

Carwithen turned red and white in turns.

"For Heaven's sake don't tell that to Dorothy," he said earnestly. "It would kill her. I am sure she never suspected such a possibility, and I smothered what little doubts I had on the subject. Swear you won't tell her. I shall marry her again as soon as we can manage it safely; but you must not tell her till then."

"Oh, no, I will not tell her," said Jack Elliott; and I said the same with my eyes.

"And you will not arrest her?" Tom went on pleading. "For my sake Jack, promise you will help me to save her? I swear she is as innocent as the driven snow."

"Excuse me asking the question," said Jack, "but are you in love with the lady?"

The was a long pause, while the police officer puffed at his cigar, and Carwithen looked straight before him. Then the Mayor looked up with his face all red that had been so white.

"That is the wonderful part of it all," he said. "I love her as my own life."

"And she cannot very well help loving you, old man," said Jack Elliot.

"Of course, that settles the matter. I think Mrs. Carwithen did a foolish thing in running away, but it is too late to think of that now. What little chance she had of getting people to believe her story, she has lost now, by her flight. You know, of course, that you are making yourself liable to a long imprisonment for helping her?"

"I'd serve twenty years to save her from arrest," said Carwithen, eagerly.

"I am afraid we shall have to bear him company if we meddle any further with the business," said the Chief of the police with a smile at me.

"Which we certainly shall do, eh Jack?" I responded, and Elliott's face puckered into a grimace.

"As our old friend has got himself into a mess I suppose we shall have to stick by him," he said mournfully.

CHAPTER VII.

"CARWITHEN is pretty hard hit," said Jack, as we left the house.

"I rather like the girl myself. She certainly does not look like a murderess, but you never know."

"I'd wager my existence on her innocence," I said.

"Possibly. I wouldn't. But I'll admit that I've felt some doubts of the lady's guilt from the first, which her story strengthens. If she had told it at the time, she might have got off. You see it is absurd to think of a woman sleeping voluntarily in the same room with a man she has murdered, and the doctor decided that the man had been dead ten hours or so when the discovery was made."

"Was there anything to connect the two?" I asked. "I did not read the newspaper report through."

"No; but there was nothing to connect Langley with anybody else in the town. He had a wife in Australia, but she did not know of his arrival. He had been to Europe, and only reached Melbourne a few days before the murder. It was supposed that Miss West had come to the hotel by arrangement with him, but had been careful not to show that they were friends for fear of his wife hearing. One of the waiters saw a lady entering the room with him about ten o'clock on the night of the murder, but could not say whether it was Miss West or not. Our people are now trying to find some previous connection between the two, but the whole affair is in my substitute's, Denver's, hands, so I know nothing about their success. If they find any connection at all, her chances are nil."

"And do you think Carwithen's plan will save her?" I asked angrily, for Jack Elliott's opinion must be nearly infallible on the point.

My heart sank when he shook his head.

"No, Carwithen can't save her," he said. "His plan is clever, and has been managed admirably, but there are a host of dangers to encounter."

"But she was going to marry and change her name."

The police officer merely shook his head.

"It must be found out sooner or later."

"And nothing will save her?"

"Oh, I did not say that. If she is really innocent I think I shall."

"How?"

"By leaving her alone altogether and dropping on the real murderer."

"Perhaps it was a case of suicide?"

"No; the doctor's evidence at the inquest proved that to be impossible. I shall return to Melbourne to-morrow, and take up the case."

"Losing your holiday?"

"Short Stories" is just the paper for seaside reading.

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My companion only shrugged his shoulders for reply.

We had reached by this time the end of the street where the Mayor lived. In the light of the street lamp at the end, a four-wheeled cab crowded with luggage had stopped, and the driver who must have been new to the township, inquired which house was Mr. Carwithen's.

At the same moment a lady who occupied the cab, put her head out of the window.

"Please tell him very clearly," she said, in a shrill voice, "I am afraid he has been drinking. I shan't get there to-night."

Her face showed clearly, as she spoke in the light of the street lamp—a determined face, which was only prevented from being handsome by a slight cast in her eye.

"I seem to know her face," I whispered to Elliott, who had been pointing out the Mayor's house to the driver.

And then, as the remembrance flashed into my mind of the photograph I had seen at Lamont's, I added, in a forcible undertone.

"Great Scott, Jack, it is Belle Aruth!"

The police officer took in the words instantly, and was ready to act upon them.

In a moment he was at the cab window, with his hat in his hand, speaking in a bland voice, as different from his ordinary voice as oil from emery cloth.

"Is it possible that I have the honour of speaking to the intended bride of my dear friend the Mayor?" he asked; and I heard a pleased reply in the affirmative from the cab.

"I expected Mr. Carwithen to meet me at Melbourne," said the lady. "I have been waiting there since my arrival, and have just decided to come on here. I suppose Carwithen will see that I have rooms at an hotel. I do not like calling at his house so late; but, of course, I am a stranger."

Jack's voice had evidently won her confidence. His calm answer surprised me.

"Mr. Carwithen, our beloved Mayor, has already set apart rooms for you at our provincial hotel, madam. I shall feel it an honour if I may have the pleasure of conducting you to them. Carwithen is ill, unfortunately. Surely you were met by the friend he sent in his place?"

"Indeed, I was not," said Miss Aruth, shrilly, "I am sorry Mr. Carwithen is ill. I suppose I had better go to the hotel."

She seemed a little undecided; but Elliott did not allow her to remain so.

In a few minutes the horse's head was turned, and my companion whispered hurriedly in my ear:

"Run like the wind to Swan's. See that they have the best room ready for the lady. Say it is Miss Aruth, Mrs. Carwithen's sister. Be sure they seem to expect her."

Then he stepped into the cab, and the man drove down a street which certainly was not the nearest way to Swan's, the best hotel in Uptown station. I cut along the nearest way, and did my best to carry out the police officer's instructions. Luckily I was pretty well known there, or I might have had more trouble at that hour. By the time that the couple drove up on the cab, they found everybody expecting them, and the proprietor himself ready to lead Miss Aruth to her sumptuous apartments.

We waited till he came down again, and Elliott chatted a little while to him in an easy way, and then drew me out, with his arm through mine, into the street.

"This is getting hot," he said, as soon as we were alone. "The old girl swears she never wrote that letter to Carwithen—it must have been an hoax from somebody in Uptown Station. Says she came by the *White Lion*, as she had agreed. I asked her flatly about the letter."

"It is fearfully awkward!" I said.

"Awkward! Why, it is scarifying!" said Elliott. "It would be a tight enough fix for Tom, if the murder and his wife's danger in that direction were out of the question. But as it is—why, the moment that woman says who she is, everybody will ask who is the Mayor's wife, and the moment that question is asked the game is up."

"Well, what are you going to do?" I asked. "You have shown yourself a genius so far."

"I am afraid I have committed myself irremediably. There is nothing for it but to go on now. You would not like to marry Belle Aruth yourself would you?"

I was surprised that he should joke at such a time, and said so; but Jack protested that he was in sober earnest.

"We must keep the woman quiet in some way," he said, "till we've shipped the Mayor and his wife off on a honeymoon to America or Japan, and that would be the best way of keeping her quiet, I guess. I have a night to map it all out, thank Heaven! Do you think you could furbish up another supper? I am getting hungry again, and can't think."

CHAPTER VIII.

It did not take the Chief of the Melbourne police twelve hours to arrange his plans. The cold supper which I raked up from my larder, the household being in bed, was so successful that in half-an-hour everything was arranged. To my dismay, I was to be entrusted with the carrying out of the whole of the arrangements.

The first thing in the morning I was to call on Carwithen, tell him of the new turn of affairs, and advise him to leave Uptown Station with his wife, nominally on a quickly-decided honeymoon, travel to any port other than Melbourne, and ship to the States. Then I was to keep Belle Aruth quiet until he was gone. I was to call upon her early, state that the Mayor was too ill to be seen, but that he had entrusted me with the pleasant duty of seeing that she was not dull. Then I was to escort her as quietly as possible to our show-place on the river, twenty miles away, and so keep her out of Uptown Station. Next day I was to take her somewhere else, if necessary. At all costs I must keep her in my sight, and prevent her worrying after Carwithen, or informing anybody who she was.

"And what are you going to do?" I asked when my companion had given me these directions in much detail.

"Oh! I must slip back to Melbourne as soon as possible to get to the bottom of that murder."

"Then we had better turn in," I suggested, "as we shall both have to rise early." And Elliott's reply surprised me.

"Oh, I am starting in half-an-hour, as we have every-

The wife will enjoy "Short Stories." Take it home.

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thing arranged. A train passes through at half-past two, and every moment is important."

I tried to persuade him to have a sleep first, but it was no use.

"Look here, old man," he said, "I owe a good deal to Tom Carwithen, and this is the first chance I've ever had of making things level. It would upset him a good deal to have that girl arrested, whatever is proved afterwards; and to prevent it, I'd do anything short of marrying this Miss Aruth. And I might do that, if the worst came to the worst. Now that things are so critical, every moment is important."

"Yes," I said, "perhaps you had better go;" and I put on my hat to accompany him to the station. But Elliott insisted on my going to bed at once.

"Remember you have a trying day before you," he said as he left me.

In spite of the need for sleep, however, I got none that night. The responsibility placed upon me weighed too heavily on my mind, and I tossed about all night trying to arranged every detail of my procedure.

Perhaps that is why, when the morning came, I got through my duties so badly.

It was all right calling at the Mayor's and there was no doubt that I made him feel thoroughly the urgent need for him to leave Uptown Station with his wife. He began to make preparations at once for leaving that very afternoon.

But with Belle Aruth I was altogether unsuccessful in my attempt to carry out Jack Elliott's programme. She absolutely refused to go with me sight-seeing. She must see the Mayor, she said. If he was ill, who so fitted as his future wife to see that he was properly attended to. I talked, and talked, and talked, and the upshot of it all was simply that Miss Aruth put on her hat, and asked me whether I would escort her to the Mayor's house, or whether she should go alone.

Elliott, I knew, would have thought of some excellent way out of this embarrassing *contretemps*, but all I could do was to delay her visit a little on one pretext and another. If we only waited long enough, Carwithen might have started on his flight.

But the most energetic talking of which I was capable could n t delay the inevitable visit long, and as Miss Aruth was perfectly determined to call on the man she was expecting to marry, I thought my best plan would be to accompany her.

The way to the house turned out to be rather a long one under my guidance, and when we finally arrived, I was rejoiced to hear the servant's declaration that Mr. Carwithen was not at home.

"But he is ill!" said my companion. "Where has he gone?"

"No, indeed, ma'am, master is quite well," said the servant. "He has just gone to the railway-station."

I thanked my stars that the girl did not add—"with his wife." She had said enough, however, to ruin Miss Aruth's confidence in me. I shall never forget the look she gave me through her crossed eyes as we turned away from the door.

"I shall not need your escort any further," she said, coldly; and calling a passing cab, told the man to drive to the railway station.

I seemed left to follow on foot; but as I managed to fall in with a friend driving in the same direction, I succeeded in reaching the platform at the same moment as she did.

The news of Carwithen's departure had managed to creep out, in spite of his efforts, and the town band had come out in full force on the platform to do honour to the occasion.

As I reached him, he was standing on the platform with a smile on his white face, shaking hands with quite a formidable band of his admirers and well-wishers, while his wife hung trembling visibly on his arm.

It was a pathetic sight to one like myself who knew the real state of affairs, and I could have cried to see Tom Carwithen smiling.

I felt that I ought to do something; but before I could decide what, Belle Aruth was upon him. She advanced to him with open hands, and then drew back, while everybody looked at her.

Poor Carwithen looked like a sheet, as the two stared at each other. Then the woman said so clearly that everybody could hear:

"You don't seem glad to see me, Mr. Carwithen? And pray, who is this lady?"

"My wife!" said the Mayor, in a whisper; and the woman broke into a discordant laugh.

"I thought there was something wrong. Allow me to introduce myself to you, madam. I am Miss Belle Aruth, to whom your husband promised marriage not two months ago."

Then, as she looked into poor little Mrs. Carwithen's face, her eyes lit up with malicious delight, as she cried aloud, in genuine surprise:

"Why, it is the woman who murdered Mr. Langley in Lean's Hotel, at Melbourne. Here, policeman, arrest her!"

She looked round, and had caught sight of Jack Elliott in full uniform, who seemed to have sprung from the ground.

He had really just left the train which came in from Melbourne just as they were speaking.

I was so ashamed of my failure to carry out his plans that, at the sight of him, I shrunk back behind the band, which kept on playing the "Wedding March," quite unconscious of the turn that affairs had taken.

Elliott strolled up slowly, and Belle Aruth turned to face him.

She did not appear to recognise him as the police gentleman who had escorted her to her hotel.

"Don't you hear?" she called to him, in her shrill voice. "That is the woman who murdered Mr. Langley. I was staying at the hotel, and can swear to her face, although the creature has dyed her hair."

Carwithen and his wife both stood motionless, with white, scared faces; while the friends who had been showing them off stood motionless with astonishment in a ring, and the band stopped one by one, as it dawned upon the players that something remarkable was happening.

Then I think a very admirable idea came into my head by which the Mayor might, at least get a start of his pursuers. I pushed my way into the ring, and said that the woman was evidently mad—that everybody knew who Mrs. Carwithen was—and that as the train was just about to start, it was a pity to delay the pair by listening to a mad woman's ravings.

The speech seemed to enrage the lady from York all the more.

"She is not Mrs. Carwithen," she screamed. "She is

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a murderess and is running away with my promised husband."

Elliott tried to calm her wrath, but the woman would not listen to him.

"You are a policeman. Why don't you arrest her?" she said.

And Jack answered coolly:

"Because she is innocent, Madam. You do not seem to have much respect for her feelings," he said, "making a public accusation like this."

"Respect for her feelings? I should think not," said Miss Aruth.

"Then you cannot blame me for producing this warrant here. It is a warrant for your arrest."

The woman's red face turned quite white.

"My arrest! What on earth for?"

"The murder for which you try to make this innocent lady accountable. I think you will have more trouble than she to prove yourself innocent of it."

Miss Belle Aruth must have been a woman of courage, for she managed to laugh quite naturally.

"And pray what is your evidence against me?" she asked coolly.

"Do you care to have it recited before these people?" inquired Elliott, who was dying all the time, I know, to let us hear what a very remarkable discovery he and his staff had made.

The woman certainly had nerve.

"I have no objection to them hearing your nonsense," she said, and my friend, the Chief of the Melbourne police, stated the case against her in a concise and masterly manner.

Miss Belle Aruth had travelled in the *King of France* with Mr. Langley, and had given out that she was engaged to him.

She had written the letter to Carwithen, which showed that she expected to marry Langley.

A letter of hers had been found among the dead man's papers, from which it appeared he engaged the room she occupied at Lean's Hotel for her, but wished her to keep their connection a secret for reasons which he would not explain.

And, lastly, the knife, which had been left in the dead man's heart, had just been identified by a passenger on board the *King of France* as one belonging to Miss Aruth.

"Rather damning evidence," said Elliott when he had finished, "and when all the details are heard, conclusive. Perhaps you will accompany me to the waiting-room, madam, until you return to Melbourne in my charge. I don't think it will be necessary to detain you or your wife, Mr. Carwithen. The train is about to start."

* * * * *

The evidence which Elliott managed to collect against Miss Belle Aruth was certainly conclusive. The eminent counsel whom Tom Carwithen engaged—for her father's sake—to defend her, accepted the impossibility of refuting it, and directed his wonderful energies to proving that her crime was manslaughter, and not murder.

The deceased man had made love to her during the voyage to Australia, and passing himself off as an unmarried man, led her to believe that he wished to marry her.

Then, on the night of the murder, in his room, he had explained his desire to keep their tie a secret. It was because he was already married. He brutally laughed away his promises. Did she imagine that a woman so old and ugly was good enough for anything but to relieve the monotony of a voyage on a ship which contained a woman worth looking at?

"Was it to be wondered at," the eminent counsel eloquently asked, "that this poor, outraged woman, stung to frenzy by his words, and the thought that he had ruined all her prospects, should reply with a knife in her betrayer's heart?"

A sympathetic jury decided that it was not to be wondered at, and Belle Aruth only disappeared from the world for a twelvemonth, after which she returned to England, I believe, on a small pension which Tom Carwithen allowed her.

"But what I liked about the woman," I said to Jack Elliott when we talked the matter over afterwards, "was her supreme impudence in trying to disown her own letter and marry the Mayor after all."

"It was her only chance," returned Jack. "She stayed a day or two at Lean's Hotel, so as not to excite suspicion by leaving too hurriedly; but, when we began making inquiries into her history, she had to marry Carwithen then to explain her presence in Melbourne. So she packed up in a hurry, and things would be queerer than they were, if we had not met her before she found old Tom out. It has been an exciting little story all round, hasn't it?"

"Yes," I said; "but I don't think the Mayor regrets it."

And both Tom Carwithen and the lady—who is really and legally Mrs. Carwithen now—assure me that they thank Heaven every day for the dangers and difficulties which brought them together. H. F.

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He took the last film from the acid bath, and looked at it through the ruby light of his lantern: a cry of astonishment burst from his lips, and the film almost fell from his fingers. For there, in photographic image, was shown the last moments of the death struggle between Geoffrey Masterton and his murderer.

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, July 15th. Postcards only, please. The first prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. A. W. Henton, 5 James Street, Rugby, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

"THEY are talking of putting in long distance telephones for the farmers' use." "How charming! Of course they can be utilised in calling the cows."

MERCHANT (to his clerk): "I am sorry I cannot let you have to-day your last month's salary; but since, as you very well know, time is money, I will give you a month's holiday."

"YOUR lawyer made some pretty severe charges against the other fellow, didn't he?" said Ford. "Y-e-e-s, but you ought to see how he charged me," said Smallwort.

HUSBAND (reading): "Nobody has ever seen a dead mule." Wife (who is thinking of something else, and not listening): "Don't you think that the money paid for your life insurance is spent uselessly?"

"AH, Miss Nightingale, that 'Winter Song' was charming; it carried me back to the days of my childhood." "I am so glad you like it," said Miss Nightingale. "Why, I could actually hear the cattle bellowing, the old windmill creaking, and the discordant winds howling about the door."

A WOUNDED soldier opened his eyes and asked: "Where am I?" "On the operating table," answered a surgeon, putting away the chloroform bottle. "We have taken out of you a fragment of a shell, a grape shot, two rifle bullets, and the point of a bayonet." "Just my luck!" mused the wounded soldier. "Everything goes against me." "It seems to me," the surgeon said, "that everything comes your way."

* DURING the recent interational occupation in China, a team of eleven Highlanders played a game of cricket with twenty men of the French force. The Scots won by a handsome margin, and the French captain could not conceal his chargin. "We don't care much for cricket," he said, "we are more at home on the battlefield." "I shouldn't wonder," replied the victorious captain with a smile, "you would doubtless make more runs there."

A YOUNG man and a young woman lean over the front gate. They are lovers. It is moonlight. He is loth to leave as the parting is the last. He is about to go away. She is reluctant to see him depart. They swing on the gate. "I'll never forget you," he says, "and if death should claim me my last thought will be of you." "I'll be true to you," she sobs. "I'll never see anybody else, or love them as long as I live." They part. Six years later he returns. His former sweetheart of former years has married. They meet at a party. She has changed greatly; between the dances the recognition takes place. "Let me see," she muses, with her fan beating a tattoo on her pretty hand. "Was it you or your brother who was my old sweetheart?" "Really, I don't know," he says. "Probably my father."

"PAPA, what do football men do in the summer?" "Oh, they brag about what they did in the winter."

WE cannot impress too strongly upon all correspondents, when in doubt whether the postage of a letter is a penny or twopence, the force of the old proverb, "Two heads are better than one."

CLEVERTON (at the seashore): "What have you got that life-preserver on for, old man? I thought you were a good swimmer." Dashaway: "I am; but I am going to give a girl a swimming lesson."

"IT'S a mighty good thing to have a retentive memory," said Figg. "That depends," said Fogg. "If the memory is yours, it is a mighty good thing, as you say; but if it happens to be the property of your wife, that's another matter."

"WOMEN are still pushing their way into every trade," said George. "That's so. I have just been discharged to make way for a woman," replied Jack. "You have. Well, well! What are you going to do now?" "I am trying to marry the woman."

YOUNG BURGLAR: "These spoons ain't silver. They are the cheapest kind o' imitation." Old Burglar: "That's lucky." "Lucky?" "Yes, take 'em along." "What for?" "The lady of the house will be afraid to set the detectives after us, lest they should find them spoons an' describe 'em in th' papers."

"I HARDLY know whether to be angry with little Charley Tapecounter or not," said Miss Summermaid. "Why, dear?" asked Miss Ennygirl. "He said he could guess my age, and when I dared him to, he said he thought too much of me to do so before others."

"TELL me honestly," said the novel reader to the novel writer, "did you ever see a woman who stood and tapped the floor impatiently with her toe for several moments, as you describe?" "Yes," was the thoughtful reply, "I did once." "Who was she?" "She was a clog-dancer."

DR. BINKS (head of young ladies' seminary, delightedly): "Ah, my dear Mr. Smith, so glad to meet you. The father of my dear pupil, Miss Smith, I believe. Ah, yes. What a large and devoted family you must have, Mr. Smith?" Smith: "Large and devoted family—really, my dear sir, I don't understand ——" Dr. Binks: "Why, yes; all last year nine of Miss Smith's brothers used to call on her constantly and take her out almost every evening."

WIFE (who has just returned from the dentist's): "I shall be awfully stupid now." Husband: "Why so, my dear?" Wife: "I have had all my wisdom teeth pulled out." Husband (with the best intention in the world) "Of course, my love, you know its nothing but a superstition the idea that wisdom teeth have anything to do with wisdom. If you were to have every tooth in your head drawn it couldn't make you any stupider, you know." He succeeded in smoothing matters over, but it was a narrow escape.

IN railway travelling one meets with curious characters. Recently there was a crowded third-class compartment in a slow train on a railway which had better be nameless, and one of the passengers thought to beguile the tedium and relieve his feelings by descanting on the proverbial slowness of that particular train. "I've been travelling," he said slowly, "on this railway for twenty years now, and——" "Twenty 'ear," exclaimed an inexperienced lady, breaking in, "good gracious me! And what station did ye get on at?"

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Mr. GEO. R. SIMS' HAIR RENEWER.

Called by him **"TATCHO."**

Romany: "Genuine," "Good," "True."

And why, pray, is the successful poet, playwright, and journalist an eminent authority on hair restorer? Eager for an explanation, a *Daily Mail* representative sought out Mr. Sims. . . .

Now Mr. G. R. Sims, as many people know, is one of the busiest men in the kingdom, but has ily affixing his signature to a letter, he looked up and extended a characteristically cordial welcome. Then he said: "I will explain. I found that I was rapidly going bald. Not seriously, you understand, but the thinning out was sufficiently marked to set me thinking out a remedy. I went to two specialists, both of whom cheerfully assured me that I should be absolutely bald in two years.

"Then I discovered the preparation which is now placed upon the market. **I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders. Look at my hair now, isn't that convincing evidence of the value of my preparation.**

"Ladies confirm my good opinion of it as a dressing for daily use. Mrs. Brown-Potter, whose beautiful hair is the admiration of the entire lady world, writes that she uses nothing but 'Tatcho.' There is nothing to prevent every woman from making her hair silken in texture and bountiful in volume, for she can obtain a bottle of 'Tatcho' now in every town or even village."

In order that the public may be able to test the superlative value of Mr. Geo. R. Sims' discovery, the Company is issuing large 4/6 size test bottles post free for **1/10**, under plain cover, one of which may be had on application. Please cut off the corner of this advertisement where marked, and send with name and address, legibly written, to the—

GEO. R. SIMS CO.,

81c GREAT QUEEN STREET, LONDON, W.C.

Mr. GEO. R. SIMS' HAIR RENEWER

Large **4/6** Bottle Post **1/10** Free.

COUPON. S.S. .....1901.

JUNO CYCLES FOR LADIES & GENTS.

£10 16/8 mo.

THE VERY BEST. FREE for FIXED WHEELS The most up-to-date. Carriage Paid.

LISTS POST FREE

	Monthly.
£8 10s. ...	14/2
£11 11s. ...	19/3
£12	20/-
£12 12s. ...	21/-
£14 14s. ...	24/6

Write for New Season's List. **JUNO** Cycles and Accessories (over 100 pages) sent Post Free.

JUNO ... ... £10 ... 16/8 monthly.
Lady Safety ... £11 ... 18/4 monthly. Latherly Hard Wood Cycle Stand, 2/6. Handlebar Basket, 10½d.

METROPOLITAN MACHINISTS CO. LTD., Juno Cycle School, and Works, 75 76 Bishopsgate Street Without, E.C., and Piccadilly Circus, London, W

ESTABLISHED 1851.

BIRKBECK BANK,

Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London.

2½% DEPOSIT ACCOUNTS **2½%** repayable on demand.

The Birkbeck Almanack, with full particulars, post free.

FRANCIS RAVENSCROFT, *Manager*.

SILVER QUEEN CYCLES.

ON MONTHLY PAYMENTS Enormous Stock. New and second-hand. From **10s.** MONTHLY. Carriage paid. ILLUSTRATED PRICE LISTS POST FREE any address. SILVER QUEEN CYCLE CO. LTD.,

221 Tottenham Court Road, London, W.

DRUNKENNESS

CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence, Mrs. C. H. (Room 8), 195 Oxford Street, London, W.

2/9 CHALLENCE TO THE WORLD—OUR WARRANTED TIMEKEEPER, **2/9**

With a guarantee to keep correct time for three years, will be sent to any address on receipt of P.O. or stamps value 2/9, and three stamps extra for postage. To every purchaser during this month we give with it ABSOLUTELY FREE a strong Mexican SILVER CHAIN. All we ask of you is to show them to your friends, as by doing so you advertise our business.

GENEVA WATCH IMPORTERS, 148 Old Street, London, E.C.

(Please mention paper.)

NOSE A. LEES RAY, South Castle Street, Liverpool, is a Specialist on Ugly and Red Noses. Send stamp for particulars of his Patent Scientific Nose Improver. Medically-approved Red Nose Cure, 2/9. Pamphlet, "Cause and Prevention," 1/-. Machines for Prominent Ears. Blackhead Cure 1/9.

SEND 6D. and secure one of our Complete **Printing Outfits.** Agents wanted for the above and other novelties.—Apply Dept. Y, 89 Aldersgate Street, London, E.C.

DO GO

to your chemist or store for a bottle of

"ANTEXEMA."

The price is **1/1½**, or post free for **1/3** from the Antexema Co., 83 Castle Road, London, N.W. It is the most wonderful Skin Cure ever discovered. It at once allays itching, and cures every form of

ECZEMA.

A treatise on "Skin Troubles" is included.

KEATING'S POWDER KILLS BUGS FLEAS BEETLES MOSQUITOS

TINS: 3d. 6d. & 1/- EACH. FILLED BELLOWS: 9D.

ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely **Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently** by taking **TRILENE TABLETS** (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: "*Your Trilene Tablets act admirably.*"

Send 2s. 6d. to **THE TRILENE CO.**, Sole Proprietors, **66 Finsbury Pavement, London.**

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "I may send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 2lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Doubtless by this time you are thoroughly interested in "The Golden Dwarf." Personally, I have rarely read so fascinating a novel, and those of my friends whom I have spoken to on the matter agree with me as to its merits. And scores of letters which I have received confirm the testimony.

Probably, in some remote corners of the country, there are people who are not reading it. I want to reach them—through you.

I want you to persuade your sister to read it, or your brother, or your wife, father, mother, uncle, aunt, sweetheart, neighbour, landlady, or lodger.

All will be delighted. And the beauty of it is, they can start it this week with the help of the specially-written summary of previous chapters. This fact is worth bearing in mind when you mention the tale to your friends.

❦❦❦

By the way, I shall be glad to hear from you regarding "The Golden Dwarf," and the other features of the paper. Anything you don't like, mention, and I will do my best to remedy the defect. It is your paper, and I am desirous of meeting your wishes in every possible manner. So drop me a line.

❦❦❦

"Miss Dolly" has been engaged to a man for two years, and he has now told her that he has been mistaken in his feelings towards her, and it is her younger sister whom he really loves. He asks her to forgive him the pain he has caused her, and says he will not speak to her sister until she has had time to give him his *congé*, and so behave as though she had tired of him. She feels very sore and miserable, and asks my advice as to the best thing to do.

Be a brave girl, "Miss Dolly," and show your lover that you, too, can be straightforward and honest, as he has been. Give him up, and in time you will see how far better it is that he should have told you how matters stood. Your sister need never know the real facts of the case, and you, I am sure—hardly as you have been treated—will be too sensible to wear your heart upon your sleeve.

❦❦❦

A correspondent sends me the following all the way from Yokohama:

Even the most gentlemanly of British burglars have much to learn from Japan in the way of politeness. Three men broke into a dyer's house while he was away, and gently asked his wife how much money there was in the house.

She answered that there was just twenty-four yen and eighty-four sen.

The robber laughed and said:

"You are a good old woman, and we believe you. If you were poor we would not rob you at all. Now, we only want a couple of kimono and this," laying his hand on a fine silk overdress.

The old woman replied:

"All my son's kimono I can give you, but I beg you will not take that, for it does not belong to my son, and was confided to us only for dyeing. What is ours I can give, but I cannot give what belongs to another."

"That is quite right," approved the robber, "and we will not take it."

❦❦❦

"Bill-poster." — The largest amount ever paid for a single advertisement was the sum given by a jeweller for a model of the Eiffel Tower, which was ordered to be executed in diamonds as an advertisement. The model was complete, including the monumental fountain under the tower. This golden marvel, wrought by one of the most celebrated Parisian goldsmiths, is 20ft. high, and the fountain, of gold, seven to eight inches, the cost being £20,000.

The proprietors of an American patent medicine offered a subscription of £5,000 towards the gigantic Statue of Liberty at New York Harbour, provided they were allowed to affix an advertisement upon it for one year.

The largest advertisement in the world is that of the *Glasgow News*, cut in the shape of flower beds on the side of a hill, back of Ardenlee, Scotland. The words *Glasgow News* can be seen and plainly read at a distance of four miles; the length of each letter is 40ft., the total length of the line 323ft., and the area covered by the letters 14,845 square feet.

As to newspaper advertising, the biggest advertisement on record was that giving the signatures to a Conservative address to the King agreed to at a public meeting in London on December 23, 1834. The words amounted to nearly 6,000, and occupied twenty-four columns of *The Times*.

On October 16, 1860, the whole libretto of Macfarren's opera, "Robin Hood," was inserted in *The Times* as an advertisement, and occupied four and a half pages.

❦❦❦

"An Enquirer."—We occasionally get an excellent definition in an anagram; as, for example, when astronomers are described as "Moonstarers," and telegraphs as "Great helps." Old England is characterised as "Golden land," and Parliament said to be made up of "Partial men." Readers can probably tell me of others.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

SHORT STORIES

ADVERTISEMENT RATES.

Single column, per inch, per insertion	£0 10 0
Double ,, ,, ,,	1 0 0
Full page inside, facing page of matter, either white paper or 2nd or 3rd page of cover, or back page, per insertion	10 0 0
Half-page ,, ,, ,,	5 0 0
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Eighth-page ,, ,,	1 5 0

All spaces above one-eighth of a page are charged at per page rate.

Series discount: 5 per cent. for 13, 10 per cent. for 26, 15 per cent. for 52 insertions.

Black blocks are charged 25 per cent. extra. All advertisements are subject to approval. All copy must be sent in by Noon on Tuesday, July 16th, if intended for the issue on sale July 30th, and dated August 3rd. The Proprietors reserve the right to hold over or suspend the insertion of any advertisement without prejudice to other insertions on order. All communications should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "Pearson's Weekly" Offices, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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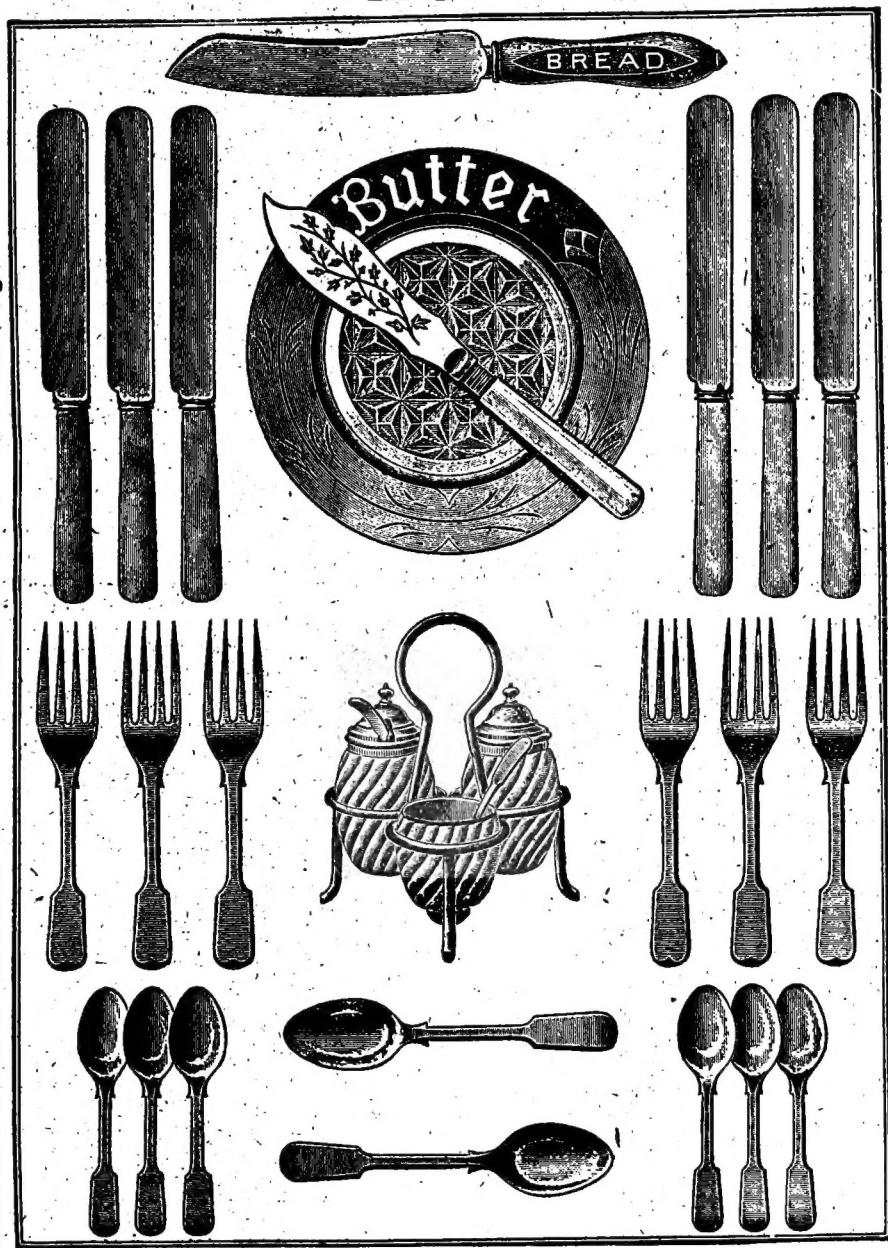
THE "DUCHESS" SET OF 26 PIECES FOR 16/6



COMPRISING:

	s.	d.
6 Fine Bone Handle Dessert Knives ...	5	0
6 Fine Hard Nickel Silver Dessert Forks	3	9
6 Fine Hard Nickel Silver Teaspoons ...	1	9
2 Fine Hard Nickel Silver Dessert Spoons	1	3
1 Carved Butter Dish...	2	0
1 Electroplate Butter Knife...	1	0
1 Carved Handle Bread Knife	1	3
1 Silver-plated Cruet, with 3 Glass Bottles	7	6
1 Mustard Spoon ...	0	6
1 Salt Spoon	0	6
	24	6

The Set complete in box,

16/6 cash.

EVERY ARTICLE GUARANTEED.

Sent securely packed, carriage free. Will also be supplied on receipt of a deposit of 3/-, and your promise to pay 5 monthly instalments of 3/-, or will be sent on receipt of deposit and if satisfactory, a further remittance of 13/6 will be accepted in full settlement. If not satisfactory return the set, and your deposit will be refunded.

Catalogues containing 2,000 Illustrations of Watches, Clocks, Jewellery, Household Requisites, &c., sent post free.

FATTORINI & SONS,

DEPT. S.S.,

WESTGATE, BRADFORD.

AGENTS WANTED

Respectable men in regular employment desirous of taking up an agency for our goods should apply for terms and particulars.

RINGS ON MONTHLY PAYMENTS.

We will send you any Ring on receipt of small dep sit of 2s. 6d. in the £. If approved of, balance can be paid monthly, or 2s. in the £ discount or cash.

No. 284. 15ct. Solid Gold set with one real diamond, £2; 9ct. Gold, 32s. 6d.

MIZPAH RING. Set with One Diamond. 9ct. Gold 10s. 6d.; 18ct. Gold, 25s.

THE TWO RINGS. 22ct. Gold Wedding Ring and Solid Gold Keeper. Government Hall-marked **30/.**

No. 248. Three Fine Diamonds. 9ct. Gold 49s. 18ct. Gold, 65s.

ACCIDENT AT LIVERPOOL LANDING STAGE,

BOOTLE MAN'S NARROW ESCAPE,

PONTOON OVERTURNED

READ.

100 Olivia Street, Bootle. June 5th, 1901.

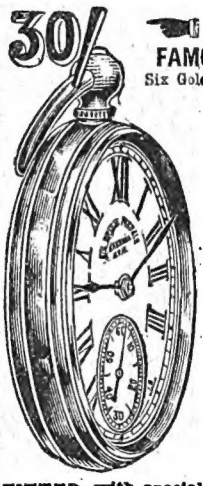
TO MASTERS, RYE.

Just a line to tell you about an accident that happened to our gang. We were shifting a pontoon from under the stage. Just as we got it out the pont on turned over, and the ten of us went into the river. T are was f ur watches in the gang, and I am happy to tell you that mine was the only one that did not stop. All the others filled up with water. It was one of

MASTERS' RYE 6 P.M. WATCHES.

It has turned out quite a success. Wishing your firm all success, Yours truly,

H. KINGDON.



MASTERS' FAMOUS WATCH.

Six Gold and Bronze Medals Awarded.

PRICE **30/-** NETT. CASH.

WE will send post paid to any address on receipt of 2s. 6d., one of our celebrated Six Prize Medal Watches, fitted in Solid Silver Cases, value 30s.

IF you approve of it you send us 2s. 6d. more on receipt, and 5s. each month for five months—30s.

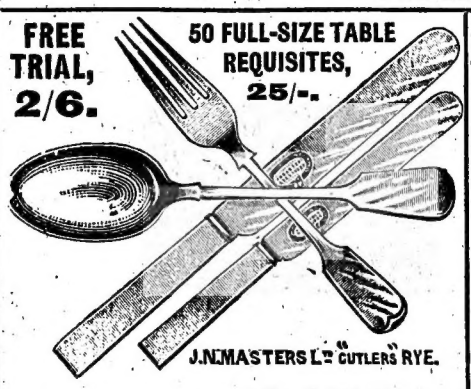
BUT should you prefer to send the balance at once send only 24s. 6d. more, as we allow 5s. discount to those who pay cash.

IF you do not approve of it we will return your deposit in full.

FITTED with specially close fittings. Silver Cases.

FREE TRIAL, 2/6.

50 FULL-SIZE TABLE REQUISITES, 25/-.



MASTERS, LTD. will send, post paid, one of these famous parcels of cutlery, 50 pieces, value 25/-, on receipt of 2/6.

IF you do not approve of the parcel we will return your 2/6 in full.

IF you approve of it, you send us 2/6 on receipt and 5/- each month for four months—25/-.

BUT should you prefer to buy for cash, send only 20/- more, as we allow 2/6 discount to those who pay cash.

PRIVATE

No one likes going into a shop to buy an "Engagement" or "Wedding" Ring or Present. YOU can have one privately from us by post in a few hours.

WRITE for our Catalogue and Ring Size Card, POST FREE to any address on application.

J. N. MASTERS LTD., (Dept. 201 S), RYE, SUSSEX.

CHEAP CYCLES are within an Ace of Perfection when fitted with

DUNLOP TYRES

£3 - 3s. per Pair.

Trade Mark.

The DUNLOP PNEUMATIC TYRE Co. Ltd., Para Mills, Aston Cross, Birmingham; and Branches.

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Supersedes Raw Suet, Lard, and Cooking Butter for Puddings, Cakes, Mince Meat, Pie Crust, Frying and Cooking. Made from best English Beef Suet only! Saves trouble of Chopping! One pound goes as far as two pounds of Raw Suet! Always sweet!

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Of All Grocers and Provision Dealers.

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HUGON & Co. LTD, PENDLETON, MANCHESTER.

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Samples sent FREE if this paper is mentioned.

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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